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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 345. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 10TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 345.] [ONE PENNY.

EDITED BY

C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

For the Week ending August 10th, 1895.

A Study in Pink.

ZIE called her the Pink Nurse. And that settled it. After that it was no longer Annie Durrant, but "Our Pink Nurse," with the whole family, and it even came to pass that she was known throughout the village as "Brigg's Pink Nurse." And the name fitted her well enough, on the whole, as her hospital gown—she was a trained nurse—her plump cheeks, and even her dimpled hands, and the ribbons on her stiff cap were each and all a most lively pink.

It all happened the summer that brought Zie her fifth birthday, when the family were down in our country cottage by the sea, and when a mighty battle was being fought in a big front room upstairs between a strange mystery we call death, and two famous physicians, seconded ably by our Pink Nurse.

For granny was gazing past us all in the gloom, and, dove-like and gentle, with all serenity, was bidding us farewell with a certain stately tenderness which was all her own.

And Zie was the only one who was happy. And she was happy, as she always is happy, because she cannot, for her life, help being so. It is as much a part of her as her freckled little nose, yellow mop of hair, and topaz eyes.

One blue spring morning, after our invalid had had a bad night, and our Pink Nurse was far more white than pink, she was sent into the old-fashioned garden to steal a little colour from the soft air.

Zie immediately extended the hospitality of her hammock, which was stretched lazily between two snowy, blossoming May trees, and there the two sat, and were very glad they were alive, for it was the month of May, which will at once explain that gladness.

"You are very pretty!" said Zie, gravely, by way of being agreeable. "I'm pretty, too. I'm glad. Aren't you?"

"Oh—I don't know."

"That doesn't sound true. Are you married?" pursued Zie.

"No."

"Why don't you get married?" she asked next.

"Nobody wants me!" rippled out the Pink Nurse, with a little laugh.

"But your name is Annie. Hasn't every Annie got a Joe?" remarked Zie, with amazement.

And the story would have ended here before it began if a man at that moment had not been passing. There was nothing singular about his being there, or in the fact that his name should be Joe—Joe Ripley. But after he passed, it was a little singular that the back of his neck and ears should so closely match our Pink Nurse's face, who was blushing also.

"Oh, you awful child! What will you do or say next? That was the gentleman in Mr. Peters' office, and his name is Joe." And the Pink Nurse made a great pretence of being painfully shocked, and ran, with a great rustle of skirts, into the house.

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"And *her* name is Annie," added Zie to herself, while the pupils of her eyes grew very big, and the little bits of gold dust in them disappeared, and the rest of the day she was very quiet.

"That 'child's got something on her mind!" announced Harriet in the kitchen, as her glances roamed across the green of the lawn, to the hammock under the blossoming May trees. For the hammock hardly moved.

Now the gentleman in Mr. Peters' office lived just up the hill, only a few doors from our cottage, and Zie's hammock was very near the road on which he passed to and fro several times a day.

That evening a surprise was in store for Mr. Ripley. Just at dusk, while all things were assuming the grey-greens of the twilight, he walked soberly home to supper. When exactly opposite a certain hammock a small voice piped up in an authoritative manner:

"Will you please be kind enough to come here?"

Mr. Ripley thoughtfully rubbed his right foot over his left foot, took his handkerchief out of the crown of his straw hat, and, after wiping his face, carefully replaced it. Then followed the suggestions offered by the small voice:

"Well, kid! What is it?"

"I'm not a kid. I'm a girl. And my name is Zie. I didn't know until to-day that your name was Joe. Our Pink Nurse told me. Would you mind telling me if you've an Annie—already?"

"I've no Annie," and Mr. Ripley grinned.

"Would you like one?"

"*I* don't mind."

"Because—I know one."

"Really?"

"Yes. That's our Pink Nurse's name. She watches you from behind the curtain."

"Really?"

"That's all," added Zie, with dignity. "You can go now."

And Mr. Ripley went home, but he has since confessed that he never felt so queer in all his life.

And in fact Mr. Ripley, the clerk in Mr. Peters' office, began to act as if under some sort of spell. Just in front of our cottage there was a loose plank in the little bridge which crossed the stream. It was a singular fact that the window where the Pink Nurse lurked commanded a view of this loose plank.

Now, avoid that plank as he would, Mr. Ripley no sooner reached that spot each day, in the full consciousness of the eyes behind the window curtain, and the calm judicious aspect of the small figure in the hammock, than some demon lured him to it, brought up his toes against it, and allowed him to pass on, with neck and ears a perfect match to the Pink Nurse.

One day he distinctly heard a titter from behind the curtain.

"Never mind," came the small voice from the hammock, "she likes you just the same, if she does laugh at you. She wouldn't watch for you every day, you know, if she didn't." Which was a sensible conclusion for a five-year-old girl.

But that plank grew to be a nightmare to Mr. Ripley. Every day he found it there.

One night at midnight Zie had a dream. All in the moonlight of a perfect May night she heard the fairies:

"Knock! knock! knock!"

"It sounded *real*," she announced over her oatmeal porridge. And it probably was, to some extent, for the plank was found firmly fixed in its place that morning by three bright new nails.

"*It's coming true*," whispered Zie to herself, and she told the same thing in strict confidence to three intimate friends, after the fashion of her sex. But as they happened to be merely a toad, a demure lady-bird, and a gaudy little bullfinch, the secret was still a secret.

That night when Mr. Ripley went home to his supper, Zie sat on the garden gate.

"Did you nail it?" she promptly asked.

"Nail what?" responded Mr. Ripley, with a brief glance at the window curtain.

"The plank. I think it was a fairy. *She* thinks it was you. Was it?"

But Mr. Ripley passed on speechless.

And as he went he was quite angry to find himself marching to the tune of

> Soon they'll be married,
> Never to part.

And, on the last day of May, when the hawthorn blossoms lay like silver snow upon the lawn, Zie propounded a remarkable question just after luncheon.

"Do all men say they never kissed anyone else in all their lives? When they get engaged, I mean," she asked, with her mouth full of sponge cake.

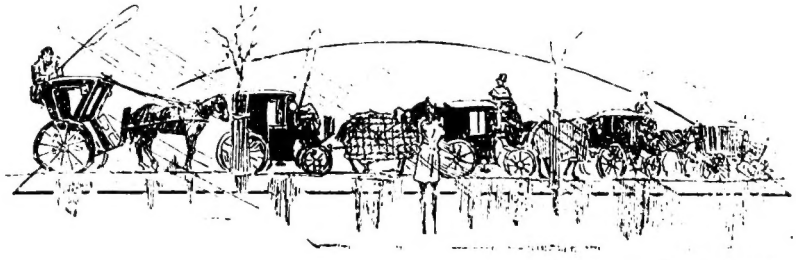
"What *can* the child mean?" ejaculated Aunt Louise, in amazement.

Zie sat up very straight.

"I mean that Annie's got a Joe, now. Oh, it's true! And they say that I'm a darling—but I knew that—always. And Joe told Annie that she was the very first girl he had ever loved, and she wouldn't believe him—but she didn't mind one bit. Why wouldn't she believe him?"

"Because—they all say that," explained mamma, stirring the cream in a cup of coffee.

Mary Bryan.



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IT CAME TO PASS

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

CHAPTER I.

"I WANT to see the world. I want to see life." It was Charlotte who spoke, leaning back on a mound of hay, with her hands clasped behind her head. "I wish I could grow old suddenly. I should like to be thirty."

Her companion smiled. He was an elderly man, with a low, melodious voice.

"There are many women of that age," he said, "who would gladly change places."

"Not with me?"

Charlotte asked the question wonderingly, raising her tall young figure on her elbow.

"Yes, with you."

She shook her head.

"I think not."

"Then the summit of your ambition is to be old?"

"I am not happy," she replied. "I have no girl-friend now. I do not care to make one. I prefer married women and—and——"

"Men?"

"Yes," raising her eyes innocently to his. "I like men and boys."

"You have left school?"

"Some months ago, but I still study. I do not mind working here, because I am allowed to bring my books into the fields and learn in the open air. They say I have outgrown my strength—I am so ridiculously tall!"

"And did you like your school?"

"Like it! Good gracious, no! You have never been to a girls' school, or you would not ask. It is a process of cramping every original idea from term to term, and moulding you in the same groove with the common herd. Your very soul is not your own. You are nothing but a slave of routine, and have only the mark of the beast in place of individuality."

"Can nothing wipe it out?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, yes; when you are introduced into Society—or married—or something," speaking vaguely, as she plucked at the withered grass. "I do not regret my lost childhood, and I long to manage my own life—it will be so interesting. Responsibility never did anybody harm yet."

"Though the flowing hair is seen no more," said the man, looking at her beautifully-shaped head, "its past is not dead, but lives in its present, its crowning glory merely supported by the staid and womanly hairpin. So that lost childhood is not lost, but gathered up and permeated by the hairpin of responsibility."

The sun crept through the hedge, sweet with garlands of dog-roses, amongst which the tiny blue-winged butterflies flitted, and Charlotte watched them with a dreamy smile.

"Do you know, the other girls wonder at my talking so much to you. They say I am too young to have anything in common with a man years my senior."

"What other girls?" he asked, contracting his eyebrows.

"Oh! my cousins, and the people you are staying with. They would be very angry now if they knew you were here in the hayfield. You won't tell them, will you?"

An anxious expression crept over Charlotte's face.

"My dear child, why should I?"

"You might have mentioned it without thinking, and——" blushing, she stopped short.

"And what?" he asked, eagerly.

"Well, I am supposed to be having a music lesson."

"I will teach you something sweeter than song," he whispered.

"I don't think you could, for I am very fond of melody, as a rule."

"Yet you prefer to lie here and dream?"

"Yes," replied Charlotte; "I prefer it."

She thought of the few

"My cousins and the people you are staying with."

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enchanting hours that remained to her, before he went, perhaps for ever. All their meetings had been purely accidental—at least, from her point of view, and yet this stranger would leave behind him a dread sense of emptiness in the young girl's heart. She pushed the hay aside and leant forward, her hands clasped together, a favourite pose of hers, and looked at him steadfastly.

"I am supposed to be having a music lesson."

"Where do you live?" she said.

"In London," he replied.

"And is the life there very different to our humdrum country existence?"

"To a certain extent. We have not the same peace and quiet."

"What a comfort! How you must love your life!"

"Indeed I do not. I have everything but the one thing I want, and that I dare not ask for. It is beyond my reach."

"I do not like to hear you talk so," declared Charlotte, twisting the parched grasses through her fingers. "It seems unmanly. If you had any stamina or determination you would never sit there and calmly say those hateful words, 'I dare not.' There is nothing more despicable than a coward! What is it you 'dare not' ask for—you who look so strong and capable?"

She shot a look of disdain at him through her long eyelashes.

"I want you," he said, boldly, gazing at her peach-like bloom, and the pretty mutinous mouth, which became suddenly subdued into calm and serious lines. "That is all, Charlotte—I want *you*."

"Then—then, it is very unkind of you to say so!" she began, with something like tears in her stormy blue eyes. "Can't you see what a dreadful position you have placed me in? I—I—have asked you to—to——"

She could not finish her sentence, but hid her flushed face in the haycock.

"I have no excuse to offer for my *gaucherie*," he replied, drawing her to him tenderly, "except that I love you, Charlotte, and, though I have tried to conquer it, the temptation has proved too strong. I know it is not fair to try and make you listen to me now, while you are still so young, in fact not yet freed from schoolroom bondage, and I am old enough to be your father. You have seen nothing of the world, you are too young to judge."

"Young!" she cried, starting up, "young! Why do you taunt me with my youth? Surely I am old enough to understand 'love.' I am not such a baby that I did not know that I loved you from the very first moment we met. I have been imagining all sorts of dreadful possibilities. First I thought you would marry my eldest cousin Rachel, and that I should have to be her bridesmaid. Then I began to wonder if perhaps you were already married, and dared not ask for fear of betraying my secret."

"Dearest, dearest," he cried, raining passionate kisses upon her face, "I am yours body and soul, for all times. You must have guessed how much I loved you. You must have seen that you were all the world to me!" Charlotte sat motionless, dumb with the knowledge, yet her smile was one of radiant happiness as she listened to his words.

"I wonder why you want me?" she said at last, turning her wide admiring eyes to his.

"From the first moment we met you have been my one hope and thought," he answered. "My dark, sunless life seemed suddenly to take shape and form. I counted the hours to seeing you, and wondered what you would say—how you would look—if you would smile. Then I told myself I was old—too old for a sweet unspotted soul—too old to gain the fresh first love of any girl, much less yours! Sometimes I decided never to broach the subject, but to bury it away in my heart for ever. You were, I thought, so gay and high-spirited you would not care for a man of my age. Then to-day you seemed sad and lonely, and I fancied you needed me. Oh! Charlotte, Charlotte! how is it I have found favour in your eyes?"

"Raymond," she said—and it was the first time she had called him by that name—"Raymond, I am not so young as you imagine, but I will tell you something of my life. I am, as you know, an orphan, living under the care of my uncle. His own children naturally prove his first consideration, and there is no real place for me. I am not wanted. The elder girls being still unmarried, I have remained in the background, as a schoolgirl, out of sight. I own I was growing tired of my seclusion, and wanted to feel my wings. Take me away from this cramped, narrow circle, and let me learn what life really is. There is no one to miss me—no one—and they will be glad to see me go."

She spoke a little bitterly, and for the first time Raymond caught a glimpse of her inner life, with its unknown worries and heart-burnings. The knowledge seemed to draw her closer to him.

"You have troubles I never suspected," he said. "I pictured you always like a butterfly here in the fields, without a care or serious thought in the world. But the butterfly's wings are not dimmed because it has begun to think."

"And such wonderful thoughts!" said Charlotte; "a whole new lifetime to consider, a bright, beautiful future, so different—so utterly different to the morning."

"I feel like a boy," laughed Raymond; "you have made me too happy! Do you know, Charlotte, I shall never grow really old, for you will revive my youth?"

"And make you re-live it," she added, tenderly.

A pained expression stole over his regular features, and he turned his face away.

"Not that, dear," he murmured. "It isn't fit to live again, even in fancy. Thank God! we are not punished for the sins and follies of the past by having to drag through them a second time."

"Raymond, how sad and strange you look! What have I said to trouble you?"

"Nothing, dear, nothing. But you are so good and generous, I want to ask a favour of you."

"Oh! I am glad," she cried. "I would do anything! Anything!"

"Then listen. I am a widower, Charlotte. Years ago I married, and lost my wife. Will you let that episode remain for ever dead and buried between us? Never allude to it—never speak of it. I only pray that my future may be better and brighter than my past. Heaven knows I will do all in my power to prove myself worthy of you. I will cherish you, Charlotte, with a love greater than any that could be offered to you in all the world. But make me one promise; never mention my past life. It was a sad and a bad one; let me forget it!"

Charlotte was touched by his evident distress, and poured soft words of consolation into his ears as she gave him the promise faithfully.

"I want to hear nothing that is painful to you," she assured him. "The present and the future are enough for me. I shall live from to-day. There was no yesterday for either of us, and we will only have one long series of delightful to-morrows."

"How good, how very good you are!" he cried, clasping her hands fervently. "But one question more before we close the subject for ever. Would you be willing to take me under any circumstances, darling? If I told you——"

She placed her fingers over his mouth, and smiled.

"You need tell me nothing. See, I have perfect trust and confidence in you, Raymond. I would marry you if you were a murderer, with a list of crimes as long as your arm."

So the old, old story was repeated yet again, as they vowed everlasting fidelity in the soft nest of hay, under the blazing summer sun. With all her heart and soul Charlotte

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surrendered her entire being to the first love of her young life—that life so scattered with thorns in her uncle's home. The thought of escaping it, and marrying the man she loved, brought such a glorious tinge of scarlet to her naturally pale face, that she had never looked more lovely.

One might have imagined from Charlotte's description that she was a penniless orphan, left on the charity of relatives. This, however, was not the case. She had a comfortable income of her own, which, with her striking appearance, made her cousins fear her rivalship. They always considered her an interloper, and not infrequently Charlotte had fostered wild ideas of living alone, freed from their criticism. She pictured a little hut, among dull-coloured, prickly shrubs, in the heart of a wild forest, where time would pass for her like a fairy tale. And now the darkest passage of her life was over, since one at last would be her very own. She felt almost glad never to have known a parent's or any human love, since her stored up affection was all for him. Raymond gazed up at the summer sky—that deep, azure sphere, blue, open, and cloudless as Charlotte's eyes, while she lay before him, flushed and excited, her bright hair dishevelled from contact with the hay—the most beautiful object in all the green landscape.

Admiration kept him silent for some moments, and then he spoke.

"Tell me your thoughts, Charlotte," he said, gently. "They must be very interesting."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Something in your eyes told me," he replied, caressingly.

"When a woman marries," she began, emphasising the words with

"I 'aided and abetted.'"

pride, "does she confess her past? Will you answer me that question?"

Raymond smiled indulgently.

"If she is good—yes."

"And if she is bad—no," added Charlotte, imitating his tone. "It would be too dangerous—she might lose him."

"My dear child, what do you know about such things?" he said.

"Very little. My experience is limited, or I should not have asked your advice."

She plucked nervously at the jessamine in her dress, gazing through the soft gleam of bright hazy distance across the fields to where the river filtered through sunlight and shade. An anxious look crept into her eyes.

"Dearest, what troubles you?" he asked.

She turned to him with a little gasp.

"Perhaps," she exclaimed, her face dyed with innocent blushes, "I ought to tell you of the one black spot in my life."

"You can have nothing to reveal," he cried, laughing in spite of her distress.

"So you think. But it is dreadful—positively dreadful!" shuddering, and covering her face. "I must tell you, or I should never have a happy moment. If, when you hear all, you feel changed towards me, don't speak—don't say one word—but just walk quietly away, right away, and never let me see you again."

"Charlotte, for pity's sake, if you are joking, remember my love, and spare me."

The pain in his voice touched her, and she looked up with a faint smile.

"I am quite earnest," she replied; "but perhaps you will look leniently upon my case as I would do on yours. I was very young——"

"You must have been."

"And ignorant. I did not realise my action was worthy of imprisonment."

"Imprisonment! My God!"

"Yes," with a solemn shake of her head, "bad enough for that."

Raymond's hands were trembling as he pressed them to his forehead.

"Go on," he cried, hoarsely. "Tell me all."

The day seemed to have grown dark suddenly and the air cold. It struck a chill to his heart as he feasted his eyes hungrily upon Charlotte, and waited for her to continue.

"Yes," she said, pushing the hair from her temples with a nervous gesture. "I am afraid it will shock you terribly. I feel I have reached a crisis in my life. You won't interrupt me?"

"No; only for Heaven's sake don't torture me longer than necessary. I cannot believe you were ever—in prison!"

"I was—I was. It is true! I will tell you. I had but one real girl friend—she made me her confidante in everything. Oh! Raymond, you would have liked her—she was beautiful——"

"Spare me these details."

"But I want to picture her to you. Her manners were as pretty as her face, and everybody loved her. She was very rich, too, with houses and lands of her own. But I mustn't forget her name. It was Bloom. Don't you think Bloom is a lovely name?"

"Go on! go on!"

"Bloom was a ward in Chancery. I think our orphanhood drew us together. Perhaps you know the law is very strict about wards in Chancery, and they may not please themselves in marriage. Now, Bloom was bent on pleasing herself, well knowing that the law would not approve her choice. She and her lover planned an elopement, and, oh! Raymond, *I* 'aided and abetted'—that is what the lawyers called it—and so they put me in prison for—one day!* Now you

* A Fact.

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have heard the worst. I can plead no excuse, except that her sorrow appealed to me. She was the only girl that could still look pretty when she cried, and, oh, how she did cry! I sat up all one night comforting her."

"My little white-souled darling," he cried, clasping her in his arms, "there is nothing in all this to cause you a shade of sorrow. If the pages of my history were only half as clear I should have needed no promise of silence from you."

"Oh! Raymond, I am so relieved! I did not like telling you, knowing I had done wrong, but nobody could resist Bloom."

So the first cloud rolled aside, and all the world was a blaze of sunshine and roses again as they wended their way back. The little drama in the hayfield was over, and Charlotte had brushed the withered grasses from her cotton gown, and scattered them to the winds. Hand in hand, like children, they passed through the meadows and along the banks of the silent river.

"It is very hot," sighed Charlotte. "I think we shall have a storm."

"Oh! no," he replied, "the sky is too clear." He glanced up and saw a range of purple splendour in the horizon, while a dark curtain of rain in violet-coloured streaks hung from the black edge of a thunder cloud. "It will come," said Raymond.

CHAPTER II.

Charlotte had taken him for better, for worse—Ramond Peel, the widower, in his forty-fifth year.

"Do you remember," she said, glancing over the papers on his study table, "I wanted to see the world. Well, if 'seeing the world' consists of martyring oneself at afternoon 'at home's,' I think I have had enough of it."

Her husband smiled as he looked up from his letters, drawing Charlotte to his side.

"Why did you go?" he asked.

"I promised Lady Logan, and I did not want to appear rude. Besides, it is impossible always to anticipate boredom, occasionally a very slight element dispels it. Town people are so oppressive with their everlasting chatter. I believe our honeymoon has spoilt me, and I only care, dear, to be with you. Lady Logan talked of nothing but her pauper boys (by the way, I promised her a subscription). Then I was introduced to a Dutchman, with a very flat face and yellow hair—great on the subject of vague and hazy impressionist pictures. He pointed out a horrible staring figure over the door, and asked me to admire 'the sweet human look of love and trust' on its emaciated features. I told him it was lamentable, upon which he handed me over in disgust to an exasperating old baronet, who had no conversation above the advance of sanitary science."

"Poor child, I pity you."

"I consoled myself by studying Lady Logan's taste. Her drawing-room is a dream of mellow beauty, and she has an exquisitely carved altar in an alcove, picked up, she told me, in Antwerp. Her husband admired the Madonna's profile. Oh, but I forgot, while bemoaning my stupid afternoon, that it was not all weariness. There was one star."

"And that?"

"A pale, sad-eyed boy, whom Lady Logan hired out of charity, 'to fiddle,' as she expressed it. I am always sorry for professionals when not in the first rank—they look so out of it. He did not seem to belong to the party, and they gave him sandwiches and claret in a separate room. Yet I never saw a more refined face—the boy was a gentleman, every inch of him. They tell me he is not great enough to push his way to the front, but I considered his was the sweetest pathos and expression I had ever heard. He was like a golden-haired angel standing above us playing, with a sad, wrapt look in his eyes. I pictured a halo and a harp involuntarily, with a gown of fine, white linen. I am sure he won't live, he had the sort of complexion that dies young. I fancied him making one wild supplication to the crowd of worldlings through the medium of music—a cry they would never understand—an appeal from Heaven. Oh! Raymond, it made me so angry—everybody talked—I alone listened. The instrument seemed to speak straight from his soul to mine, and the harrowing tales of fever-infested districts fell on deaf ears. My old baronet could not even get a grunt of approval or disapproval out of me. The Dutchman still discoursed in sonorous tones to my left-hand neighbour on Lady Logan's grotesque objects of art, but I was free, drinking in the soft, throbbing notes. I was back once more in a summer hay-field, listening again to the trilling of birds—and then to the low growl of thunder. Gradually, it seemed, the shades of evening gathered, and a broad, red moon rose behind feathery branches. I could hear the lark's good-night psalm. That is what I call *music*, Raymond! Directly the last strain had died away I asked for an introduction to the talented young musician. My hostess raised her eyebrows and condescended to make him known. The boy flushed crimson, and appeared quite unnerved by my enthusiasm. He played again before I left, and the second time with more confidence and assurance. He said he was greatly affected in tone, touch, and actual execution by his audience. Do you know, Raymond, his eyes reminded me of yours?"

"You must not make me jealous of the rising generation! I strongly object to your starting a handsome young *protégé*," he said, fondly.

"I like you to be jealous," she whispered. "It is the strongest sign of love. Nothing flatters a woman more than to see her husband suspecting other men of loving her. In his

"I only care, dear to be with you."

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eyes she has such a power to charm that he pictures a victim at every turn, since to him she is the most lovable human being."

The fresh, unsophisticated country girl looked impressively dignified as she rose and glanced down on Raymond Peel with those strikingly brilliant eyes which first attracted him.

"I became the success of the season."

"I am taller than Lady Logan," she continued, with a return of her childish manner, catching sight of her elegant figure in the glass. "I am five foot nine," with conscious pride. "My height annoyed me in old days. I was branded by that ugly term, 'a strapping girl.' There is something so unromantic in the expression. But one night, shortly after we returned from our honeymoon, I overheard somebody say at a dance: 'That is Charlotte Peel. She is a very fine woman!' which only points the difference between a holland frock in the country and white satin and diamonds in town."

He liked to hear her prattle on, one moment harping back to her strangely recent childhood, and the next playing the part of the over-indulged wife, and exacting from him the homage of a subject to a queen.

Charlotte had walked to the window and pushed back the curtains.

"There is a strange lady at our door," she said, "and it is late for callers."

Her husband was writing a letter, and vouchsafed no reply.

"I shall have to go and talk to her, I suppose," sighed Charlotte, seeing Raymond pre-occupied, "and I am sure I have no conversation to-day. I wish it were man's mission to receive visitors and dispense tea; it would save women an infinity of trouble." She made a wry face, and moved slowly towards the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, as the manservant appeared.

"The lady would not give her name, madam, but she asked for Mr. Peel."

"Raymond, the visitor has come to see *you*. Who can she be? Ah! perhaps she wants a subscription, and fancies she will wheedle a larger one out of a pliable man."

"Say I am not at home."

"Nonsense!" cried Charlotte, "she has already been admitted, and is probably raging below at your delay. Besides, I am really afraid that laziness is contagious, and you have caught it from me. Shall you see her alone, dear? She is dangerously handsome!"

"Silly girl!" laughed Raymond, pulling her arm through his, "as if I should let you desert me when I most need your support."

"I am frightfully curious," she whispered, "yet I feel rather shy of the woman in red."

As they entered the drawing-room there was a *frou-frou* of silken skirts, and the lady swept forward with an exclamation of delight.

"Raymond!" she cried, holding out both hands, "I meant to surprise you! Is it not wonderful that we should meet in the land of the living after all these years? I only learnt half an hour ago that you were married, and you could have knocked me down with a feather! Not one of the storms I weathered at sea gave me half such a shock, and I had a rough passage. 'Why! he must be a hundred,' I said. So this, I presume, is Mrs. Peel; glad to see you, my dear."

She had spoken without pausing, in a strong colonial accent, while she emphasised her words with gesticulations.

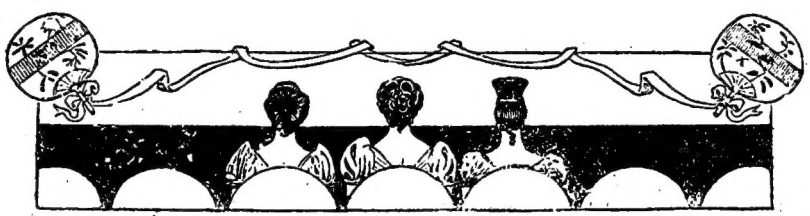
Charlotte glancing at her husband, fancied he appeared less anxious to renew the acquaintance than his voluble friend. To her surprise his face was pale, and for the first time she found him at a loss for words.

"So you knew my husband long ago?" she said, filling in the gap, yet feeling strangely undemonstrative after the Australian's gush.

"Yes, Charlotte, this is Mrs. Donnington-Bain," replied Raymond.

"And he was struck dumb with astonishment when I descended upon him like a whirlwind," continued the visitor, scrutinising Charlotte. "But," turning to Raymond, "after you left Australia, things did not go well with me. I dropped a pile of money in some bogus companies, and was finally wrecked by the failure of a bank. Then I said to myself, 'Augusta, you have wits and talent. Don't let poverty drag you down. Rise up, and see if you can't take the population by storm. Go on the stage.' You may think I was old to begin, but I was always mad about theatricals, and the managers thought my appearance so satisfactory that they took me on spec. Their good judgment was rewarded, and I became the success of the season. At first I appealed to the vulgar taste, and played low comedy; but I got sick of that. My contempt for the whole thing was so profound that it robbed me of all enjoyment. Then I suddenly leapt into tragedy, and from Australia I went to America, where I have toured for the last five years, playing everything but Ibsen. Having established my reputation there, I arranged for a flying visit to London, and find myself free from want and much sought after. Plucky step, wasn't it?"

(To be continued.)



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An Ardent Wooer

YOUNG, brave, intelligent, Ferreol's principle of life was to be astonished at nothing. Moreover, he lacked nothing. At Paris he encountered Angele. He loved her, and told her so. She listened. He mentioned marriage.

Angele was as good as pretty.

"Have you a family?" asked Ferreol.

"A father; yes."

"Where is he?"

"Brest."

"What doing?"

"Re-fitting vessels."

"I will go at once, then," said Ferreol, calmly.

"Why?"

"To demand your hand. I love you—you love me. You do love me?"

"Yes."

"Good. The train leaves at eight this evening. At eleven to-morrow I land at Brest. Thirty minutes later arrive at the dock; see your father; ask him the question; receive consent at 3 p.m.; take the train back, and the day after to-morrow, at seven in the evening, say to you, 'Angele, thou art mine!'"

She blushed, smiled coyly, and softly murmured: "Go, then."

Ferreol took a hansom; the driver was tipsy. It did not astonish him. In the waiting-room his trunk was stolen. Nothing astonishing in that. Then the train ran off the line. Pooh! child's play! Ferreol had his nose half-broken. Ridiculous obstacle!

Briely, it was not till the third day after his departure from Paris that Ferreol arrived at Brest, and swift as a startled zebra, he rushed through the Rue de Siam.

"The ship-refitting shops?"

"Rue de Penfold, third building on the left."

He took it at full speed to make up for lost time, to presently halt before a building on which was the magic word:

REFITTERS.

Before him was a door. He knocked, entered, perceived a gloomy hall, a dingy camp-bed, on that bed a sailor smoking a cob pipe.

"Monsieur Kenezek?" said Ferreol, civilly.

"Yonder, or maybe below."

"Then I'll go and find him at work."

"Thou, my chicken?"

"Why not?"

"It would be——"

"Bah! no phrases! Speak to Monsieur Kenezek I must on business that admits of no delay, and I *will* speak to him at once, if I have to go to the bottom to do it."

The sailor rose instantly, shifted pipe and quid from right to left, and cried out admiringly:

"Thou, too, then, art of the craft, my chicken?"

Ferreol comprehended nothing, but his principles dictated his answer.

"Yes," said he, turning with decision.

"Come on, then. Two steps away only, but you'll dress your self here."

Dress himself, and here? Anyone but Ferreol would have let escape him at least a gesture of surprise, but he—never! After all, to present himself to a future father-in-law, perhaps it was more expedient to assume a black coat.

"So be it!" replied he.

The sailor moved a step to the door, but stopped thoughtfully, turned, unhooked from the wall a greasy placard, and with a mumbling, "No humbug this, you see!" began to read and to question Ferreol as follows:

"You are not in a state of intoxication, are you?"

"I!" said Ferreol, indignantly.

"And—more than an hour since you've eaten?"

"Three hours, precisely."

"You are not in a perspiration?"

"Dry as a fish-bone."

"And your health is good?"

"Sound as cast-iron."

"Nerves and temper calm and equable?"

"As an oyster at high water."

"Good. All as it should be. Hurry!" said he, "begin! undress yourself."

Ferreol up to this date had asked no one in marriage, but, sharp as he was, he never supposed that this act—important, it was true—would be accompanied by such formalities.

One of those, however, whom nothing amazed, he did not flinch, but proceeded to strip himself.

Decidedly obscure in this closet, Ferreol was reduced to conjectures, smell, and feeling; still, it was distinctly an under-vest, and other things, and shoes that the sailor drew from a locker and laid before him.

"With these," said he, "you can defy the perspiration."

"In truth I can!" said Ferreol, covering himself with the articles, which exhaled a singular odour of tar.

"Push each button of the pelerine into the corresponding hole of the collarette. Adjust the copper

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valves, and turn the screw-nuts. Close the latter till the joining of garments, pelerine, etc."

It was long, but Ferreol was patient, and said only:

"You are sure I shall find Monsieur Kenezek there?"

"Certain sure," responded the sailor, grinning; "he can't get away."

Presently they reached a jetty advancing into the bay. At the end of it the round crown of a building, from which, at a shout from his conductor, came running a second sailor, who placed himself without a word behind Ferreol's back.

"All ready?" said the first.

"All ready," responded Ferreol.

"You see the slate and the pencil hung to your side?" queried the other again.

"Slate and pencil both," assented Ferreol, amiably.

It was the last word he spoke.

Click! clack! rattle!

The helmet was over his head, bolted to his shoulders, the screw-nuts hard and fast.

At last a flash of enlightenment! Blinded, stifled, one single instant Nature rebelled against his principles. Too late, however, and protestations inopportune.

For now he felt himself lifted, carried a pace, suspended in space; then a strange sensation of cold mounting from feet to waist and from waist to shoulders.

He opened wide his eyes, and through the helmet's "peepers" saw a fish flit past him.

Preliminaries decidedly not commonplace!

He continued to descend with relative activity.

A monster advanced to meet him. It seized the slate and scratched upon it. Ferreol read, "I am Kenezek. Who are you?"

The moment was solemn. They must come to an understanding somehow. The situation had grown unique. "I am Ferreol," responded he on the slate. "Live at Paris. Income a thousand a year. Love Angele, your daughter, and have the honour to ask her hand in marriage."

"Marry her if you like. I——"

"Consent?"

"Consent? Yes. Good riddance, too. But quick, get off; I've work to finish."

Ferreol shot aloft.

"If I'd been you," said the sailor above, "I'd have waited ten minutes. Kenezek quits work, you know, every day at five o'clock."

Ferreol looked at his watch. Ten minutes to five.

"No," said he, "a man like me never waits a minute."

And he promptly returned to Paris.

To marry the charming Angele?

No. Fifty odd hours late in returning, the charming but impatient Angele had married the other fellow.

M. L.

My First Opium Smoke.

It was not many days after I had landed at Hong-Kong before a strong desire took possession of me to visit an opium den, and endeavour to verify for myself the truth of reports concerning the peculiar effects of that drug upon the nerves.

I accordingly accepted the proffered services of an honest-looking coolie, and, after haranguing with him in every language I knew, eked out with all the pantomimic gestures I could bring myself to perform, I knocked into his misshapen head my wants.

He officiously conducted me through the streets, and in a short time I found myself in a narrow, dirty-looking, evil-smelling thoroughfare, so narrow, in fact, that there seemed barely sufficient space for the passage of four persons walking abreast.

Presently my guide, signing me to follow him, unhesitatingly dived into the dark entry of a low, dilapidated, uninviting-looking building. I trod close at his heels—feeling rather nervous and uncomfortable, I confess—through a passage of uncertain length, and, on arriving at the end, a large curtain was drawn aside, and I was silently ushered into a spacious apartment, luxuriously furnished in the gorgeous Oriental style.

Motioning me to a vacant couch, my guide proceeded to obtain from one of the attendants the articles necessary for my experiments, and soon after returned bearing a small table, upon which was a pipe, with a thick, flute-like stem, but very small bowl, a lamp, and brass box. Opening the latter, he produced from it a small pill of the dark pasty drug, and inserted it into the pipe, which he ignited at the lamp. He gave one or two draws to insure its working, then, ostentatiously wiping the mouthpiece with his greasy sleeve, presented it to me with a grimace, no doubt meant for an encouraging smile.

I reclined back upon the couch, and inhaled, with as much indifference as I could assume, the pungent fumes of the stupefying preparation, experiencing the while the various sensations of the criminal on his way to execution.

Presently I felt a peculiar drowsiness stealing over me, against which I began to struggle at first, but by degrees it overpowered me. Gradually a haze, which every moment appeared to grow more dense, emanating from nowhere in particular, blotted out slowly the objects surrounding me, and I had a dim recollection of someone taking the pipe from my relaxing fingers.

For some time all was blank; but presently I found myself home once more and standing in the library. The only occupant was my father, who was seated at his desk writing rapidly, and although his eyes more than once wandered in my direction, he seemed unconscious of my presence.

I strenuously endeavoured to speak to him, but I could articulate no sound, nor could I stir from the spot where I was standing. I thought that I stood intently watching him until he presently threw aside the pen, and hurriedly folded and sealed the note he had been writing.

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So vivid was my dream—so clearly and distinctly did every minute incident impress itself upon my mind, that I even remember noticing my father's hand tremble as he again took the pen to address the letter.

When he had done this he started from his chair, and began pacing nervously to and fro, as though labouring under some great perturbation, passing and repassing me so near that he almost touched me.

Suddenly he paused in his wild perambulations, and, advancing towards the mantelpiece, placed the letter, which he still held in his hand, above the mirror, and as he did so I noticed that it was directed to my mother. No sooner had he turned again, however, than the document slipped from the position in which he had placed it, and disappeared from view between the back of the glass and the wall.

I followed every movement of my father with the keenest interest, wondering what was to happen next.

He cautiously approached the door leading from the apartment, and listened attentively. Apparently satisfied, he next unlocked a drawer in his desk, and produced from it a small revolver (I remembered it well, for it was I who had purchased it for him a year previously as a safeguard against burglars), which he handled caressingly. He then sank into his chair with a deep sigh, and, gazing into vacancy, appeared to be deeply absorbed in thought. In that attitude he remained for some time.

It was not long before I comprehended my father's intent.

I saw him quickly raise the weapon which was in his hand, and press the muzzle to his temple.

Desparately I struggled to save my father from himself. I felt the veins in my forehead swell out like whipcords. With clenched teeth, madly I strove to overcome the influence which held me as with bands of steel.

He held the revolver for a few seconds rigidly to his head, then let it slowly fall again, as if he lacked the necessary courage to carry out his design.

Once more was the revolver raised. Once more did I struggle frantically. I saw my father clench his teeth as he nerved himself for the fatal act. I heard a sharp report, and, concentrating all my energy by a superhuman effort, gave utterance to a loud cry as I rushed forward to catch him ere he fell.

But all faded away, and instead of being in my father's library, I was once more in the Hong Kong opium den, my guide standing by my side.

"Cap'n notee hab nicee dream—bad," said that individual with a grin, as I gazed round vacantly for a moment.

Without deigning a reply to his jocose remark, I rewarded him for services rendered, and, wiping with trembling hands the clammy perspiration from my brow, hurried out into the open air.

It was the next day before I entirely recovered from the unpleasant effects of my first pipe of opium, but many weeks elapsed before the vision conjured up by it ceased to haunt my thoughts. Every detail seemed indelibly stamped upon my memory, and it left an impression which I found difficult to throw off. In fact, I even began to persuade myself that the incident had, indeed, been enacted in reality, and once yielded so far as to commence writing a letter home in order to set my mind at rest; but the next moment, fearing the ridicule which I knew the receipt of such a communication would evoke, I laughed over my superstitious weakness, and concluded at the same time that I was a fool.

* * * * *

Once more I stood on English soil. Nor did I regret it, for the wandering mode of existence I had been practising at length began to pall upon me.

The voyage across the Atlantic from New York was performed uneventfully, and on reaching Liverpool I dispatched a telegram to my people at Highgate, informing them at what time to expect me.

The train was on the point of departure as I entered the station, and I hurriedly jumped into a compartment as the whistle sounded.

The only occupant beside myself was a stout, middle-aged individual, who was seated opposite me, seemingly absorbed in the *Daily News*, but I often caught him peering inquisitively at me over the top of the paper in a manner which seemed very familiar.

Presently he exclaimed with a chuckle, while he extended his hand:

"Bless my soul, Jack, don't you remember me? Glad to see you back again, my boy, safe and sound."

Immediately on hearing his voice, I recognised him as an old friend of my father, whom I often met at home.

"Mr. Tollervey," I answered, taking his proffered hand and shaking it cordially. "I thought your features were not unknown to me. You are the first to welcome me home after my long absence. Well, and the news. There must be quite a budget."

My travelling companion instantly assumed a grave demeanour, and favoured me with a peculiar look, the import of which I was at a loss to understand.

"My dear boy, you must prepare yourself for bad news."

I started and inquired rather anxiously:

"Has anything happened at home?"

"Your father," returned my companion, abruptly.

"What of him? Is he ill?" and a dreadful apprehension seized me.

"Worse," and Mr. Tollervey gazed from the window, as though something we were passing greatly interested him.

Soon he turned from it, and after a few moments' silence said:

"Your father is dead, and they say that he was murdered."

"Murdered!" I gasped; "and by whom?"

"Your brother was arrested for the crime, but I do not believe he did it," answered Mr. Tollervey, in a low voice.

I sank back upon the seat speechless and inert. Great Heavens! What a home-coming for me.

"There surely is a mistake somewhere," I presently said; "my brother cannot be guilty of such an act. Why has he not cleared himself?"

"Ah, he's in a bad fix," exclaimed my companion. "His version of the affair was that your father committed suicide."

"What!" I ejaculated, springing from my seat in amazement; "then it's the truth."

Not knowing the true cause of my emotion, Mr. Tollervey gently pushed me back into the seat, bidding me to compose myself.

"If you will listen," said he, "I will give you the facts of the case from beginning to end.

"It was about eight o'clock in the evening. The coachman was locking up the stable, when he was startled by hearing a pistol shot, the sound apparently proceeding from the library. A light was burning in that apartment, and running as quickly as possible up the walk he peered through the window. The blinds were not drawn, so he obtained a full view of the

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interior. Your father was leaning forward in his chair with an ugly wound in the temple, and life appeared extinct. Your brother was standing close behind him, his face very pale, holding in his hand a smoking revolver. The coachman immediately gave the alarm, and medical aid and the police were quickly summoned.

"The next morning your brother was arrested for murder. At his trial he swore that he was innocent, and asserted that as he was about to enter the library on the evening in question, he heard the report of firearms. Rushing within, he picked up the revolver, which he saw lying smoking upon the floor, and, as he did so, beheld the condition of his father, who was expiring in his chair. So great was the shock that he was for the moment rendered helpless, unable to act or to think, until the rest of the household appeared on the scene, having been alarmed by the coachman."

"Tell me the date upon which this happened?" I inquired, nervously.

After a moment's thought my fellow-traveller replied:

"Upon the 12th of October last."

Could it have been a coincidence? for upon that very day I had made my opium experiment, which consequently resulted in that horrible vision brought back again so fresh to my memory. At first I thought that possibly I was mistaken; but it was not so, for the entry in my diary destroyed all lingering doubts, and I vainly sought for an explanation of the mystery, for mystery it was.

Eventually the train steamed slowly into the station at which we were to alight, and there I parted with Mr. Tollervey.

Hailing a cab, I was speedily driven home, but my arrival was announced by no boisterous demonstration. That a cloud enveloped the house I saw at a glance upon entering, and although I was quietly received, at the same time my welcome was by no means a cool one.

My mother, who had been prostrated by the blow, was still confined to her room, so the only person with whom I could converse, and elicit the information I required, was my sister.

I learnt nothing of importance from her, however, more than I had already heard, save that my brother's trial had been adjourned until the next sessions, when he would be again arraigned before a special jury; so that I had not much time before me if I wished to do anything towards proving his innocence.

I rose next morning, after spending a sleepless night, and, before the rest of the household were stirring, proceeded to the apartment in which my father had met his death, an unaccountable fascination seeming to attract my footsteps thither.

Immediately upon entering, as my eyes encountered the familiar objects around me, I shuddered involuntarily as the vision of the suicide came more forcibly than ever to my mind.

Mechanically I crossed over to the spot where I thought I had stood whilst under the opium's mysterious influence, and once more in fancy witnessed my parent's strange proceedings.

There, in the same position, stood the desk, upon which he had written the letter, and opposite was the mirror, whereupon he had placed it after completion.

I instinctively glanced upwards, as though expecting to see the letter still there, but I suddenly remembered that it had disappeared from view between the mirror and the wall, as my father turned away.

My heart palpitated rapidly, as, acting in obedience to a sudden impulse, I started towards the mantelpiece and removed the mirror from its resting place.

The next moment it slipped from my nerveless fingers, and fell to the floor with a crash, for between it and the wall, discoloured by the dust, I caught sight of a letter, which, at the same moment, I saw was directed to my mother in my father's hand-writing.

For a time I was completely overcome by the discovery, and sank into a chair until I could regain possession of my faculties. At once I concluded that my vision in the opium den was, indeed, the truth, and I had been a witness of what actually had occurred, although so many miles away.

I placed the letter in my pocket, and wandered aimlessly about the place in feverish impatience, anxiously waiting for the moment to arrive when I could interview my mother in private, and at the same time I was burning with curiosity to know the contents of the strangely-discovered epistle.

After breakfast my mother summoned me to her room, and then in as few words as possible I related how the letter came into my possession, making it appear, however, that my finding it had been purely an accident.

With trembling hands she broke the seal, and, after reading, handed it back without uttering a word, although I noticed that her face was paler than before.

It seemed that my father had been labouring under the delusion that we were ruined, and accused himself of having beggared his family although at the time of his death his affairs seemed never in a more flourishing condition.

The letter ran on in this strain, and concluded by bidding farewell to all, adding that being unable to face the blow he had resolved to meet death rather than live the victim of self-recrimination.

The truth was now painfully apparent. That my father's mind had succumbed to the great strain of business anxieties was plain, for as I have before said, he had incurred no losses, but, on the contrary, had been very successful in his undertakings, so consequently he had committed suicide while temporarily insane.

Needless to say, the letter clearly established my brother's innocence, although by what means the finding of it was brought about I deem it best to hold a secret, and you are the first to whom I have imparted it.

W. H. W

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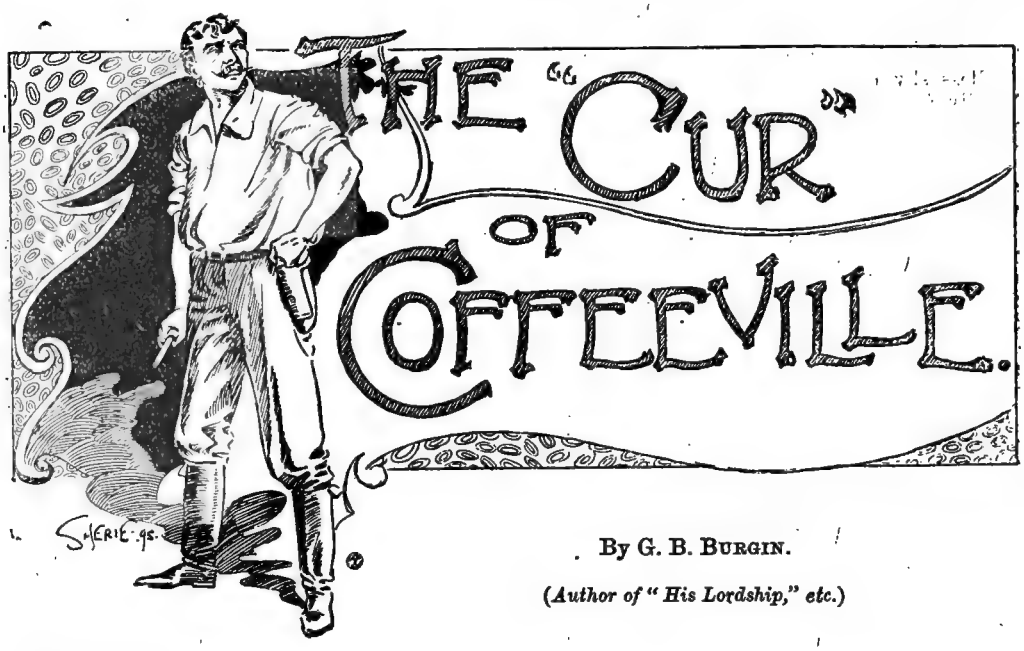


By G. B. Burgin.

(Author of "His Lordship," etc.)

ANTONIO and Juanita sat within the dimly-lit room of the ranche, the gambler scowling sullenly, and the pretty vivacious Mexican girl very much in love with the handsome villain her husband, yet bored to death by the monotony of her surroundings. Even the thick adobe walls could not keep out the blistering heat. Antonio chafed at his enforced retirement from the cheating of *Gringos* (Yankees) in Coffeeville; Juanita pined for the delights of dancing and the gaming tables at which she acted as decoy. If only Antonio's temper were not so bad, they might have been plying their vocation merrily at this moment, and now—Piff! What great children men were with their tempers and jealousies and little barking pistols and sharp ugly knives to let the life-blood slip from out of one another with a few dexterous slits and slashes. Piff! But a girl must be careful how she flirted with a *Gringo*, or there was an end to everything. No more dancing or gaming, but only a flower-covered bier before the high altar, the swinging of incense by acolytes, the droning voice of the Padre reciting the prayers for the dead; and then a little hole in the ground where even the music of the *festa* failed to reach one. Piff! again; and she came back to the present with a sigh which did not tend to improve Antonio's temper.

Juanita yawned, let one slipper lazily fall to the ground, and inhaled the smoke of her cigarette. "Mother of God!" she said, "but it is dull—and hot. Almost as hot, Antonio, as when you knifed the tenderfoot at Coffeeville, and had to run for the ranche."

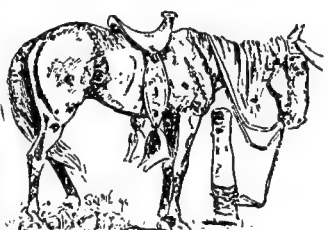
Antonio Pinto, a tall, wiry, athletic scoundrel of great personal beauty, bent his black brows at pretty Juanita, as if she had recalled unpleasant associations. "Take care, light of my life," he murmured, "lest I treat you in the same way. You are overmuch given to the society of *Gringos*."

Juanita's cigarette fell after her slipper; she followed the cigarette, and lazily wound her way across the mud floor with slow, sinuous movements to the desperado who lay on a rude couch opposite. The girl threw her arms round Antonio and kissed him passionately. "Thou knowest, little lamb, that I should die if aught befel thee," she murmured, caressingly.

Antonio turned over and went to sleep again, one hand clasping a revolver, with the air of a lamb who knew his own value as mutton, and was prepared to defend it from being prematurely put on the market at all hazards.

Thus repulsed, Juanita struggled up with a yawn which displayed every gleaming white tooth, and went outside, her bare feet leaving delicate outlines on the dusty floor.

Outside, the adobe walls of the ranche were hot to the touch. The girl looked listlessly at the long, low line of stables, vainly seeking for something to interest her on this dullest of all dull days. Here and there posts had been driven into the alkaline soil. By every post stood a dejected broncho, ready saddled, his head down, as if convinced that he had been tied to the post, and that it was useless to attempt to run away, even should there be an object attainable by running anywhere. The pitiless sun caught the copper-mounted pommels of the red leather saddles until they glowed again. All around it beat down on dusty alkaline plains, sparsely covered with sage brush. Not a tree was to be seen for miles; the level plain simply melted away into the horizon



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without a break or dip to vary its monotonous regularity. It was a sleepily languid world, in which even the insects were too drowsy to give one sign of life. Above, the cloudless sky, its vertical sun-rays streaming down with deadly force; around, the grey dust of the plains, the sombre adobe buildings, the death-like silence, the utter absence of animation in any living thing. No wonder that Juanita yawned, and wished again that Antonio would content himself with cheating *Gringos* in a gentlemanly fashion, and not knife them afterwards because they were foolish enough to object to the originality of his methods.

As Juanita stood in the doorway, a yellow, lean, hungry mongrel incautiously approached the nearest and sleepiest-looking broncho, which was apparently meditating on the abundance of spurs and riatas in general, and the scarcity of food in particular. A moment later a thin, yellow, howling streak of something canine disappeared in the direction of the stables, and the broncho languidly raised his head with an air which implied that if dogs would persist in running up against posts, accidents were bound to happen.

Juanita gazed at the sleepy bronchos, the panting dogs in the dust, the copper-coloured sky, and patches of sage bush with another sigh of disgust. Suddenly she noticed a little speck coming from the westward. "*Que demonios!*" she muttered, anxiously sheltering her eyes with her hand. After the lapse of half an hour she could see that it was someone on foot, who limped wearily along, eyes cast upon the ground, as if seeking a crack therein to hide him from the perfervid sun. On nearing the ranche the man reeled in his walk. Juanita thought that he must be either tired or drunk, after the manner of the "Americanos" who have been "cleaned out" at the gambling saloons, stripped to the shirt, and then turned adrift to the tender mercies and fellowship of those other social and equally poverty-stricken outcasts, the coyotes. Once or twice he staggered despairingly, and shook his clenched fist at the sky. When near the low adobe walls of the ranche the fellow halted doubtfully, crept forward to the sheltering doorway, and fell in a heap at Juanita's feet. "Water, water!" he cried, hoarsely; "I'm parched—choked—dying of thirst!"

Before getting him any water, the girl ran her fingers lightly over the man's pockets, in search of concealed weapons in shirt or trousers. There were none. Reassured, she brought him a well-filled gourd, and laughed to see the poor fellow gulp it down. When the gourd was empty, she fetched a bucket filled with the sparkling treasure, and dashed some of it over his shoeless feet. "Cleaned out, eh?" she asked, hands on hips, as she leant against the doorway.

As the stranger crawled towards the bucket, here and there a bronzed patch of skin showed faintly through the grey alkali dust, which also streaked his hair, and hung in powdery bags beneath his eyes. The individual who plunged his head into the bucket might have been fifty; the face which emerged from it was that of a man of three or four-and-twenty, worn and thin, but resolutely handsome.

The girl motioned him to continue his way; but the stranger only shook his head, with a muttered "*Manana, manana* (by-and-bye); I guess it don't matter whether I die here or out in the sun," he said, despairingly. "It's cooler here, that's the only difference."

The girl looked at him significantly. "*Madre de Dios*, you won't find a bullet very cooling; and it's quicker."

"Yes," said the man, slowly; "it's quicker; that's all you can say for it, I reckon."

"*Quien sabe?*" doubtfully retorted Juanita.

"Well, get it over and finish me." He threw open the breast of his shirt, crawled outside, as if out of consideration for people who might object to a corpse in their house, and propped himself up against the wall.

"*Que lestina!*" (What a pity!) cried Juanita. "Why should I want to kill you?" Her velvety eyes rested upon his lean, handsome face for a moment. "*Bienvenido.* What use is a dead *Gringo* to anyone? He can't dance, or play the guitar, or," she whispered, "make love."

The man was about to answer, when, with a stealthy cat-like tread, Antonio emerged from the ranche, his pistol ready cocked. "What's all this?" he asked, suspiciously, covering the tramp with his weapon.

The girl shrugged her shoulders indifferently, and turned away with a softly uttered "*Adios*" to the stranger. "Your successor at the saloon does his work well," she said. "The man is almost naked. He wants to be shot."

Antonio raised the pistol. "Where?"

"Heart's the best place," the tramp rejoined, indifferently. "Get it over, and fling me to the coyotes."

Antonio hesitated. His hands were already red with blood. "Bah," he said; "who's to bury you! Will you eat my bread? If so, *bueno*."

"I don't seem to have much of an appetite for anyone's bread," answered the tramp, reluctantly. "It's the worst jag I've ever been on." He rubbed his head in a puzzled way.

"Like a big ball of fire?" asked Antonio, enviously. During his term of office at the saloon he had never plucked his pigeons so thoroughly as this one appeared to be stripped. "Get up," he said. "Juanita, find him something for his feet. If there is anything wrong, we can settle it afterwards." He tapped the revolver significantly with one brown, thin finger, leisurely rolled a fresh cigarette, and went inside the ranche. The woman followed him. She knew how well that little revolver carried.

Thus left to himself, the tramp curled up inside the door, and fell asleep. When he awoke it was dusk—a cool, lovely dusk, in which the moving figures of people outside assumed gigantic proportions. The night was filled with the odorous breath of distant flowers wafted from the city across the barren plains by the grateful breeze. One or two peons lounged about the fire, clad in huge hats and striped blankets, for after the fierce heat of the day, the air was chilly. One by one the stars began to creep over the darkened plain; there was a savoury smell of cooking outside struggling with and alternately overcoming and being overcome by the breath of the night-breeze. As the stranger sat up and began to realise where he was, Juanita passed through the doorway and joined Antonio in the eating of some savoury mess seasoned with red peppers. When they had finished, Antonio beckoned to the tramp. "Eat of my dish, then you are my man and no cur. If you ever

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disobey me, I'll blow out your cursed *Gringo* brains."

He waved his arm in all directions, as if emphasising the distribution of his new retainer's brains. That worthy followed the movement with a grin. "They'd not go so far as that," he said; and ravenously began to eat, the Mexican never relaxing his vigilance for a single second, although, when the meal was over, he tossed the tramp a packet of cigarettes, and lit one of them at his own for the newcomer.

In the middle of the night, the tramp felt someone bending over him. Long, light fingers dexterously searched his shirt and trouser pockets. It was only the Mexican making sure that Juanita had done her work thoroughly. "'Twould be safer to blow out his brains," said Antonio, rising reluctantly, his eyes gleaming in the moonlight. "Bah, this poor devil who calls himself 'Smeeth,' has eaten my bread and may be useful."

As he moved away the tramp sat up. Even in the moonlight his grin was expansive and wide. "That's a close call," he muttered, surveying Antonio's retreating form. "It's getting cold." Then he unconcernedly drew Antonio's old blanket round him and went to sleep again.

In a month "Smeeth," as Juanita called him, had become a member of the family. Antonio paid him three dollars a week to make himself generally useful, and then, with the indifference of his race, awaited the course of events. At times, when the society of Juanita palled upon him, Antonio played cards with "Smeeth" and Juanita's brother, "Smeeth" stipulating beforehand, that, as he was an inexperienced Englishman, who had already been plundered of every farthing he possessed, he was not to pay up if luck went against him. Events showed the prudence of this arrangement, for Antonio always won. "Smeeth's" only consolation under his defeat was to obtain permission once a week to go into Coffeeville to buy whiskey. As he was naturally generous, and never drank it all himself, Antonio always gave him permission to go. "Smeeth" generally returned with the news that the feeling against Antonio (he had knifed two men who had the impertinence to accuse him of having cheated—an accusation which was strictly true) was stronger than ever, and industriously fomented by the new holder of the saloon in the hope of keeping Antonio permanently away from such a promising district. Antonio's language when he heard of this iniquitous proceeding was not pleasant; it required all Juanita's tact to prevent him from throwing himself into the saddle and making a wild rush through the town, revolver in hand. She pointed out that even if he were not killed, such a proceeding would infallibly induce every inhabitant of Coffeeville to attack the ranche, armed to the teeth, whilst now, such was the terror inspired by his marvellous strength and accuracy as a marksman, not one of the Yankee dogs dare come within a mile of the place. Soon the whole affair would blow over; Antonio could make some votive offerings at the next *festa*, and shortly after resume his honourable and gentlemanly calling. Whereupon Antonio grunted a surly assent, and searched "Smeeth's" pockets with renewed vigilance. He had every confidence in that worthy, but still it was just as well to be careful. The reward set upon his (Antonio's) head was a very large one, and "Smeeth" seemed to be a poor man to whom this amount represented opulence and unlimited whiskey.

When Antonio went away after this proceeding, "Smeeth's" blood was up, although he had snored through the ordeal in his customary ingenuous manner. "I guess I've had enough of this," he said. "It's about time I put an end to it. If I don't he'll end me. I'm afraid, too, of the way that black-eyed girl looks at me, wanting to know if England ain't a beautiful place to live in. It may be comfortable enough for some people to live there, but 'tain't altogether healthy for me, when I'm no more an Englishman than she is, but only a *Gringo*."

The vision of Juanita, cigarette in mouth, riding through a quiet English lane upset "Smeeth's" gravity altogether, and he laughed until Antonio suspiciously returned to see what was the matter.

"Had a bad dream," said "Smeeth," humbly. "Seemed to fancy someone was tickling me. Warn't it funny, Boss?'

Antonio showed his long knife significantly. "Señor Smeeth, it is this which does not make people laugh when it tickles," he said, gravely.

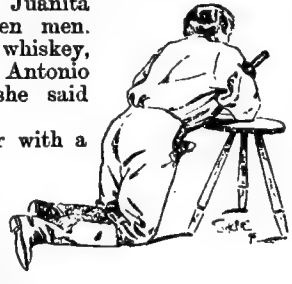
"Oh, no, 'twasn't like that," said "Smeeth." "Seemed more as if someone was feeling in my pockets. I've dreamed that most nights lately."

Antonio pretended not to hear, and was striding away when "Smeeth" preferred a humble petition that he might spend the next day in Coffeeville, on the ground that he was dying for whiskey and must have it.

When Antonio had gone back to bed again, "Smeeth" hastily dug a hole in the floor, put a piece of board over the cavity, replaced the earth, and resumed his interrupted slumbers.

He was afoot early the next morning, and departed gaily after a cautious flirtation with Juanita, who, tired of the seclusion of the ranche, pined for the Coffeeville dancing saloons. When he returned late in the afternoon he was in a very hilarious mood indeed. He hurriedly stumbled into his little room, and came out again to see if anyone had noticed his return. "It is plain that the Señor has all he can carry," said Juanita, meeting him on the threshold of the ranche.

"Smeeth" looked at her with drink-sodden eyes, and reeled by again into the little room allotted to his use. When Juanita peeped in she found him bending down in the corner hastily patting the ground. She laughed and thought it very funny. Juanita was accustomed to drunken men. "If you have finished the whiskey, I would not be you when Antonio awakes from his siesta," she said significantly.



"Smeeth" turned to her with a foolish smile, "It'sh or right," he said, thickly. "Jusalittle bit happy; thatsh all. It'sh or right," and he staggered to his feet.

Antonio's voice was heard calling for "the cursed English pig."

"Pig'sh c—c—comin' with his swi—will," said "Smeeth," lurching forward with a jug of whiskey. "Wheresh y'r br—ruther?"

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"Guarding the passage," replied Juanita. "When he sleeps, Antonio watches for the *Gringos*."

"Smeeth" lurched forward into the room, nearly spilling the whiskey in his drunken haste. Antonio snatched the jug away, kicked him into a corner, and drank deeply. "Smeeth" poured a little of the whiskey into a tumbler for Juanita, who sipped it daintily. From time to time the man in the passage, whose duty it was to prevent the revellers from being surprised, put his head in at the door and smelt the odour of the whiskey with dilated nostril. Presently, Antonio's head fell forward on his breast; he slid back with a snore. Juanita also begun to snore, more musically than Antonio, but, for all that, an undisguised snore.

"Smeeth" slipped a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket, clicked them over Antonio's huge wrists, and doubtfully surveyed the doorway. "It's my turn to search now," he said, with a grin, and took away Antonio's weapons. His next step was to go into the passage, and put a pistol to the head of Juanita's brother, who leant against the wall rolling a cigarette. In less time than it takes to relate, that worthy was weaponless and handcuffed also. "Smeeth's" recovery from his drunken fit seemed miraculous in its celerity.

"Now," said "Smeeth," "I ain't agoin' to hurt you as long as you keep quiet. March into that room, and sit down on your bed."

Juanita's brother got up with a scowl, walked meekly into the room, and swore softly as "Smeeth" turned the key on him.

It took "Smeeth" an hour to get his captive into a Mexican cart. "I'm most afraid I drugged that whiskey too much," he murmured, as he drove quietly into Coffeeville, drew up before a certain building, and gave a low whistle.

The cart was immediately surrounded by half-a-dozen American detectives. "What's the use of bringing in a body?" growled one, who seemed to be in authority. "I knew you'd never get him alive."

"Throw a bucket of water over him," said "Smeeth," quietly; "but don't take the bracelets off, whatever you do."

Antonio was dragged out of the cart, soused with a bucket of water, and half-led, half-carried into the house. It was some minutes before he sat up and realised that he had been trapped by a detective for the sake of "blood-money." His lowering eyes roamed restlessly round the room, looking for his betrayer, but "Smeeth" unostentatiously kept in the background. When he saw that the recognition could no longer be delayed he stepped forward, and the two men looked each other in the face.

"*Caramba!* You Coffeeville cur!" hissed Antonio, straining at the fetters which fastened his wrists. "And I gave you bread!"

The handcuffs did not yield to the enormous strain put upon them. "Take them off for three minutes. Mother of God, only three minutes," Antonio implored the chief of the detectives. "Then you can do as you please with me."

"Smeeth" nodded to his Chief. "That's fair; I caught him by a dirty trick. There's a wall round the courtyard and a door each side. Give him a revolver and put him one side; I'll come in at the other. If he plugs me, you're to let him go; then it's all fair and square."

"I don't hold with this foolishness," said the Chief, irresolutely.

"I've eaten his bread," said "Smeeth," *alias* Billy Wentworth, the celebrated detective. "It's a dirty trick I played him, and I'll take my chances."

Antonio's eyes lighted up. "*Vamos*, that is better," he said, bowing courteously to the detective. "Only three minutes; that is all I ask."

"A good deal can be done in three minutes," said "Smeeth," drily, handing a loaded revolver to Antonio, and turning his back upon him with the utmost coolness. "Give him a drink, boys. If he plugs me he's to have a day's start." He turned round again and looked Antonio full in the face as if in response to the other's mute questioning. "Oh, I'll look after her! She was drugged, too."

Antonio took the whiskey handed to him. "Smeeth" did the same.

"To our meeting in the next world, Señor," cried Antonio.

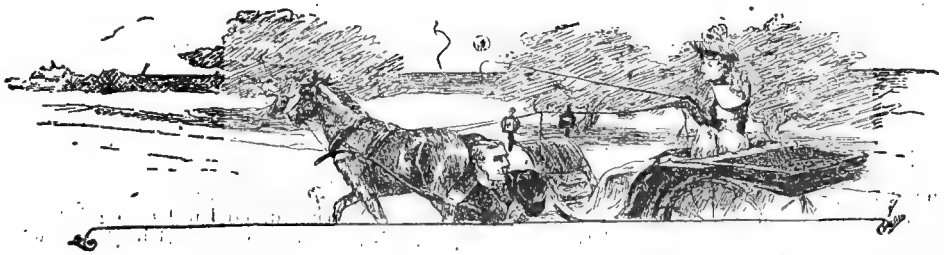
"Amen!" said "Smeeth," flinging his tumbler to the ground, and following Antonio into the cool, open air.

The two men entered the courtyard from opposite sides. In a few seconds their revolvers began to sound with short, sharp, whiplike cracks. Then all was silent.

"We'd better go in now, boys," said the Chief, nervously. "He's downed Billy for sure."

They went in—at a run. Antonio lay flat on the ground riddled with bullets. "Smeeth" sat somewhat languidly propped up against the wall, with a wound in his shoulder. The chief regarded him reproachfully. "Plugged by a Mexican!" he said, in sorrowing tones. "Billy, I didn't think it of you."

"Smeeth" grinned apologetically. "I'd eaten his bread," he said; "that sort of stuck in my throat, so I let him fire first. I wasn't going to be shamed by a low-down greaser, not much" and he fainted.



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Worthy o Woman!

"IF you ask me," the girl was saying, as the canoe glided down beneath the grey-leaved willows, "I think the man who would commit suicide for a woman can have had very little to do with the other sex."

Percy Wallace drew his paddle out of the water and laid it across his knees, raising his dark eyebrows interrogatively.

"Why?" he inquired.

"Because not one in a million is worth the sacrifice, and that one only by comparison."

"Nevertheless," the man said, "you can hardly take up a paper without finding the report of a suicide for which the only motive is a love affair."

Sybil St. Croix gave a little contemptuous shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"Love has got a bad name, like Monte Carlo," she said, smiling across the boat at her companion, "and like Monte Carlo it is made the scapegoat for a great deal of iniquity with which it has nothing to do whatever. The world, after all, is blind. It blames the last straw for breaking the camel's back. No man, whose mind was not already unhinged, would ever blow out his brains for a woman, unless, as I said just now, he knew nothing about the sex. There may be a few who are worth waiting for, but none who are worth dying for—none;" and the girl leant back among the luxurious pile of cushions in the bow and laughed.

A rippling breeze had turned the nose of the canoe and driven the little craft ashore among the flat green blades of the waterflags that rustled together by the riverside. The man pushed off mechanically, and they drifted on again between the steep green banks and sloping meadows where the cattle stood knee-deep among a golden crop of marigolds. It was growing late, and the last lingering gleam of sunshine had faded from the fleecy clouds that floated here and there in the pale blue expanse of sky. A light mist was rising from the river, and the early summer heat had given way to the freshness of the evening atmosphere.

"You may be right—or partly right," Wallace said, at last, taking a few lazy strokes with the paddle and resting again; "but, for all that, exactly two years ago to-day I tried to drown myself for no other reason in the world than because a woman, a mere slip of a girl, thought it amusing or clever to deceive me."

Sybil leant forward.

"Did you, Percy," she exclaimed, incredulously. "Tell me?"

"There is nothing to tell."

"But what happened?"

"Nothing. That's the ignominious part about it."

"Did you sink?"

"No, I swam ashore."

Sybil laughed.

"It is not easy to take one's own life in cold blood," she said.

"And still less in cold water."

"For which, I suppose, you are duly thankful—now that you have had time to think the matter over?"

Percy Wallace shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I have never been able to make up my mind," he answered, sadly.

"Then I will make it up for you. Love is fiction—and only fact if you choose to make it so. In another twelve months you will have forgotten all about this girl."

The man shook his head.

"You would not say that if you have ever known what it was to be in love yourself," he answered. "I can never adore anyone again as I worshipped Miss Edmunds. Never!"

"Rubbish!" the girl interposed. "Someone else will take her place before long—someone who is a great deal more worthy of your affections than she was."

They had reached the landing-stage by this time, and Wallace helped the girl to disembark, and fastened the painter before he said, half lightly, half in serious mood:

"Do you imagine, Sybil, that a man who has ever really loved could love again?"

"Twice," mockingly. "A hundred times! Not in the same way, perhaps, but with equal fervour. Percy, I honestly think that you ought to cease moping for this girl, whom you only cared for as long as you did not know what her true character was. You are making yourself miserable for nothing."

"You don't understand," the man said. "It would not be fair for me to ask any girl to be my wife when I know all the time that I love another better. Love her, although I know she deserves only to be despised and hated, and although I believe and hope for my peace of mind that I shall never set eyes on her again."

Nevertheless, Sybil St. Croix's words had made an impression on Wallace. He thought of them again on his way up to town that night, and he was still thinking the matter over when he reached his rooms in Jermyn Street a few hours later and found a note waiting for him on the table. The handwriting was not altogether

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unfamiliar, and he tore open the envelope with some degree of interest.

"Dear Mr. Wallace," it ran, "just a line to say we have arrived at the Grand Hotel, and that I hope to see you very soon. Are you engaged for lunch to-morrow? If not, I shall be delighted if you care to come round,—Most sincerely yours, Olive Norton."

Wallace read the letter through twice and then put it down with a smile. It was distinctly gratifying that this girl should remember a promise made six months before, to write and let him know whenever she came to London. They had met at a country house during the winter, and seen a good deal of each other. So much so, indeed, that embarrassing rumours had flown round about a pending engagement. They recurred to Wallace, and possibly it was the recollection of Sybil's remarks that afternoon that made them appear less ridiculous than they had at the time. Now he came to consider the matter he could not see what there was ridiculous about such an idea at all. Perhaps the girl really cared for him. He had never thought of this contingency seriously before. He pulled a long face at the notion, and began pacing up and down the room.

Six months before, if anyone had asked him why he was not in love with Olive Norton he might have given two answers, both of which would have been equally true. He could have said that his affections were set elsewhere, and added, had he felt in the humour, set at nought, or he might merely have answered that so many men were, or pretended to be, in that felicitous state, that he did not care to join the herd.

Now, however, Wallace—setting forth the pros and cons of the matter with careful impartiality—decided that Sybil's view of his own position was the only sensible one to take. That Miss Norton cared for him was at least a reasonable supposition, and of his own feelings towards her he entertained no manner of doubt. He liked the girl and admired her and enjoyed her friendship.

The following day he went round to the hotel for lunch. Miss Norton's reception was certainly flattering, coming from an attractive girl, a girl whom he knew as an absolute fact had been proposed to by several of the most run-after men in London. It had never occurred to him before how absolutely pretty she was, and, charmed by her vivacious manner, and her evident appreciation of his attentions, he promptly proceeded to press his suit, thinking, as all wise men think, that there is no time like the present for making a good impression.

Lunch finished, they drove together to the park.

"I am afraid that it is too early for the fashionable world to be here," observed Wallace, as they alighted from their hansom, and turned together down the long shady avenue beside the Row.

"So much the better. Let us sit down here, away from everybody, and talk."

They selected two chairs in a long empty line against the railings, and sat there undisturbed by the sight of a single human being, save one solitary equestrian who was cantering slowly up and down in the sun.

Wallace was rapidly making up his mind to bring things to an issue. He could see from the girl's manner that she was in love with him, and now and then when she turned and said something, and their eyes met, he felt a thrill run through him which gave him exquisite pleasure. There was a gratifying sense of superiority, too, in having won this girl, when he had watched others try and fail and go away defeated.

Olive Norton was leaning back in her chair, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes fixed on a bright bed of flowers across the road, supremely happy and contented. She was smiling a little, showing a pretty set of teeth, and an unusual depth of colour heightened the beauty of her face.

"How is Sybil St Criox?" she asked, suddenly.

Percy Wallace looked surprised.

"Quite well, I believe. I have just come back, from their place. But why do you ask like that?" and he turned round a little and gave his companion a quick, furtive glance.

"Because I am told you admire her so."

"Who told you?"

"I don't know. Everyone says so."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"We are the best of friends," he said, speaking, in a low, lazy voice.

"Friends are people whom we like too much to love?"

"Perhaps——. But it is utterly untrue that Sybil St. Croix is anything to me, in the way you mean. We tell each other everything. Confidence is not the beginning of love. I only adore one person in the world—and that is you."

He did not change his voice or his position; but the little green spider he was chivying with his stick escaped and he did not notice it.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," the girl exclaimed, "I like you much best when you are serious."

"I am serious. I mean every word that I say. Olive, I love you."

The girl's heart was beating fast. A hot wave of colour rushed to her face. "I don't believe you," she said a little breathlessly. "You wouldn't say it like that if you did."

Wallace looked up and down. He was anxious not to make himself ridiculous. No one, however, was in sight. He turned quickly and caught her in his arms, kissing her three times before he let her go.

The moment the girl escaped she sprang to her feet hot and flushed, catching her underlip with her teeth.

"I never said that you might kiss me," she panted.

Wallace captured her hand and drew her back to her seat.

"Don't talk nonsense," he said. "If the man may not kiss the girl he is going to marry ——"

"Who said I was going to marry you, sir?"

"You must, now you have allowed me to kiss you here;" and satisfied with this delightful form of argument he released her hand and sat looking at her with love-filled eyes. Sybil St. Croix was certainly right. There was not an atom of doubt about that. So he thought and wondered at his own inconsistency before the day was out.

There was silence for some time and then the girl said:

"Am I the first women you have ever loved well enough to speak to as you have spoken to me, Percy?"

"There was one other," Wallace admitted, truthfully, "but I never asked her to marry me. Thank heaven I found out in time what manner of girl she was."

"Perhaps she would have said 'No,' if you had asked her."

"Probably. I know now that she liked someone else better. But you never can tell."

"I want to hear about her, Percy. I am jealous already."

"It is an old story now," he said, passing his hand over his face and sighing a little. "Three years ago I was wintering at Cannes, and there I met this girl who was travelling alone with her mother. I saw a good deal

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of her, as people do when they are thrown together in a place like that. Sometimes I would be round at their hotel three or four times a day. We walked together and drove together, and went excursions up the olive-clad ravines.

"From the first evening we spent in one another's company, strolling about the luxuriant gardens in the soft moonlight, I knew that I and my fate had met, and each day I grew fonder of the girl, and by every token she returned my affections. When I was away from her I was miserable until we met again, and she used to tell me that she had counted the hours of my absence.

"Well, when a girl says things like that to you, and apparently means them, you naturally begin to regard her as your special property. About three weeks after we were first introduced I happened to be strolling along the promenade one day at dusk by the side of the picturesque little harbour filled with shipping from which many gay streams of colour were waving gently in the wind. No one except a few peasants and sailors were in sight. I lighted a cigar and sat down.

"Presently my attention was attracted by a little boat which put off from one of the yachts, and was pulled rapidly towards the landing-stage. Thinking the owner would probably be on board, I moved down with some curiosity in that direction, keeping, however, on the further side of the road. As the boat neared the shore I saw that there were two passengers on board—a man and a girl, whose back was turned towards me.

"The man was short and squarely built, with a sallow complexion and a small black beard. For some reason or other the face seemed repulsive to me. He was bending forward and speaking eagerly to the girl, and just before the landing-stage was reached he seized her hand and tried to kiss her. From where I stood it seemed to me that the girl resisted for a minute and then gave way, and the man's arm was still round her waist as the little wooden pier was reached. They got out together, and as she stepped ashore the woman's face was turned towards me for an instant."

Wallace stopped for a minute, coughing a little, and Miss Norton bent forward, laying her hand on his arm.

"Go on," she said.

"I recognised her in a moment," the man continued, speaking in a low, vibrating voice. "It was Miss Edmunds. . . . . Just for a second I felt sick and helpless, and then a sort of boiling rage came over me, and in my anger I called her all sorts of horrible names. If Heaven had placed a knife in my hands I could have killed her—or myself.

"The two stood together, conversing in low tones. The girl was gesticulating a little; the man's hands were in his pocket, and he was frowning while he listened, and now and then stamped restlessly on the ground. What could it mean? Surely such a man as that could not be attractive. I compared him with myself, and laughed.

"Then I thought of his yacht, and my thoughts had no sooner taken this direction than I began to understand. The owner must be a man of enormous wealth—a millionaire, perhaps. People may say what they like, but there is nothing which money cannot buy—nothing. My heart was beating, my legs trembling. Perhaps it was the sound of my footfall on the gravel which made Miss Edmunds look round. The light fell full on her white face, and I saw that she was crying.

"The sight was more than I could stand in the state of mind I was then in. The moment her back was turned I crept nearer, hardly knowing what was in my heart to do. But before I had time to act, before I had time to think, there was the soft rustle of a lady's skirt behind me, a tall figure brushed by, and stopped as if suddenly transformed to stone in the middle of the roadway.

"At the sight of this apparition I shrunk back into the shadow of the trees, but from where I stood I recognised at once in the new-comer—Mrs. Edmunds. Apparently the man I had been watching recognised her too, for no sooner had she appeared than he turned on his heel without a word or a sign to the girl, and, springing into the boat, was rowed rapidly away across the harbour.

"The two women passed close by me. Mrs. Edmunds was strangely agitated, and I could see that the younger one's face, although wet with tears, was proud and defiant under the other's reproaches. Angry as I was, I felt sorry for her. In spite of what I had seen I could not bring myself to believe that anyone could come between her and me. A scrap of the conversation reached me as the two women disappeared.

"'We must leave Cannes at once,' the mother was saying in a bitter ringing voice, which sounded inexpressibly sad. 'Oh! why does that man haunt us. Promise me, Gertrude, that you will never speak to him again—never. Promise me, darling.'

"The girl's answer was inaudible.

"So they were going away. I threw myself down on a seat, and buried my face in my hands.

"Nearly an hour must have passed when I got up with a shiver, and, buttoning my coat, set off at a brisk pace for my hotel. I had made up my mind then what I would do. That evening I would see Miss Edmunds, and ask her to be my wife. But when the time came I found it impossible to get her alone to myself. It was not her doing. I could see that she was chafing under her mother's vigilant watchfulness as much as I was. At last I had to go. She followed me into the corridor. Her look, her manner, everything set my pulses on fire.

"'I must tell you,' she said; 'we're going away to-morrow night.'

"'Why?' I asked. I watched her face closely, breathlessly. She did not change colour, her eyes met mine fearlessly as ever, only the corners of her mouth dropped a little."

Percy Wallace stopped in his narration. The Park attendant was demanding payment for the chairs. He received the tickets mechanically, and then turned to his companion.

"I don't know why I should weary you with this lengthy recitation," he observed. "Suppose we talk of something else. You are finding the heat too much?" for Olive Norton's face had suddenly turned deathly white.

"No, no," she said, quickly; "go on. I want to hear. You told her that you loved her—?"

Wallace nodded.

"And she said that you were more to her than anyone else in the world?"

Again the man assented.

"And then—"

"Mrs. Edmunds came up behind. I went at once. It was no use stopping longer. When I was back in my rooms again, I sat down and wrote her a brief note, asking her to drive with me the following morning, as we might not see each other again for some time. It was nearly eleven when I received her reply. 'I am extremely sorry,' her letter said, 'but I have to lunch with a relation. Can you come round in the evening before we go?'

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"I knew Miss Edmunds too well, or thought that I did, to suspect for a moment that this was merely an excuse to avoid a *tête-à-tête*. Her sweet admission of affection for me had disarmed even the suspicions which the scene I had witnessed had aroused. The man perhaps had influence over her, but that there was any love lost between them, I could not and would not believe. I had no cause to fear a rival, and disappointed as I was for the moment, I was thoroughly contented and happy.

"For want of something better to do, I went over to Nice by rail, and guided by some miserable instinct turned into the London House for *déjeuner. Sitting at a little table together near the window were Miss Edmunds and the stranger.* That I tell you frankly was the most miserable moment of my life. She looked up, caught my eye, and half rose from the table with a piteous gesture.

"I went across the room towards her, outwardly calm, but a raging fire within.

"'Your relation, I suppose, has not turned up,' I said, and with that I swung round on my heel and left the room. I heard the man utter an angry oath and spring to his feet, but I did not wait or turn. I loved the girl too much to create a scene there. Yet I was mad with jealousy and hate, and every other passion. Possible it was no longer to deceive myself into believing that this girl, whom I loved with such insane intensity, was not in love with this dark-browed stranger. Nothing short of love would have led her to compromise herself in the way she had done with him; to deceive me; to ignore her mother's entreaties and to disobey her commands.

"From that day to this I have never set eyes on her again. I have told you everything. Let us talk about some more interesting topic—about ourselves—about my love for you."

Wallace rose as he spoke, quitting his seat in that automatic way which implies an absent mind and preoccupied attention. Miss Norton followed his example.

"I would like to ask you one question," she said, with slight embarrassment and in a halting tone: "Do you still love this girl?—perhaps I have no right to expect—"

"You have every right," he interposed, quickly. "But I find it impossible to analyse my feelings. Nothing can ever justify her treatment of me. She is unworthy either of affection or admiration—that at least I know."

His companion did not answer at once. Had he glanced in her direction he would have been terrified at the piteous expression on her face; but he did not look up, he did not even raise his eyes from the ground.

"Suppose," she said abruptly—and her voice was low and tremulous—"suppose that you were to discover that you had judged Miss Edmunds wrongly—what then?"

The man frowned.

"I do not care to consider such a ridiculous hypothesis," he said, with some warmth. "It is hardly a fair question. Surely you can believe me, you can trust me, when I say that you are all in all to me, now."

A bright, radiant look came into the girl's face, and for a moment the sanguine and delightful reveries in which she had indulged earlier in the afternoon returned with their soft enchantment, and thrilled her with passionate delight. Then the heavenly light faded, the rapt look gave place to one of melancholy.

"Listen!" she said, touchingly; "I have no right to keep back the truth from you—I know Miss Edmunds; she is my best and dearest friend."

The man started.

"How strange," he murmured, half to himself. "I suppose she is married by this time to her wealthy friend. I wish him joy."

"She is not married!"

"Ah!"

A moment's silence, and then Wallace said:

"Why, I wonder," musingly.

"Because the one man she cared for threw her over and broke her heart."

"A just punishment. Who was the man?"

"*You!*"

"But at least I cannot be held in blame. The stranger——"

"Was her father."

Wallace was about to interrupt, but Miss Norton silenced him with an imperious gesture. "He was divorced from his wife," she went on, struggling manfully against a choking sensation in her throat, which rose up and thrilled her, "and separated from his daughter, whom he loved passionately—devotedly. I need hardly explain more."

The man was trembling from head to foot.

"Cruel, cruel!" he muttered to himself. "How could I have thought so badly of her—ah!" and he turned away with a long indrawn breath of pain. The next instant he laid his hand on his companion's arm.

"What you have told me," he said, tenderly, "must make no difference between you and me."

"That cannot be. In justice to you and to my friend—from my love for you both—I must release you. I am going to call on Miss Edmunds now. Will you come with me?"

Like one in a dream, the man followed her as she stopped a passing hansom and entered. They reached the house and went up the broad stairs together.

Outside the door Miss Norton stopped. Her face was white and, in spite of herself, her lips trembled.

"You go first," she said, and pushed him forward gently. Wallace heard the door close behind him. He turned quickly. Miss Norton had remained outside.

Slowly she descended again into the hall. "Ten minutes," she murmured to herself—"the shortest engagement there has ever been—yet I am content to know that he has loved me."

And Wallace was left alone with Miss Edmunds.

W. A. W.

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The Transformed Caliph.

ONCE upon a time, the Caliph Chasid, of Bagdad, on a lovely afternoon, sat comfortably upon his sofa. He had slept a little and appeared cheerful after his slumber. He smoked a long pipe, drank now and then a little coffee, which a slave poured out, and, as if it tasted good, stroked his beard in a pleased way. In short, one perceived from his appearance that he felt in a good humour.

At this hour one could easily have speech with him, because he was then always mild and amiable; and at this time also his Grand Vizier paid his respects. This particular afternoon he came as usual, but appeared very thoughtful, which was not his usual custom. The Caliph took the pipe partially out of his mouth, and spoke: "What makes you wear so thoughtful an expression, Grand Vizier?"

The Grand Vizier flung his arms crosswise over his heart, bowed himself before his master, and spoke: "Sir! whether I wear a thoughtful expression I know not, but there stands yonder at the castle a peddler who has such pretty things that it angers me that I have not more superfluous gold."

The Caliph, who for some past time would willingly have given pleasure to his Grand Vizier, sent his black slave to fetch the peddler. This was a little stout man, swarthy in appearance, and in ragged dress. He carried a chest in which he had all kinds of wares—pearls and rings, richly inlaid pistols, goblets, and combs.

The Caliph and his Vizier examined everything, and the Caliph finally bought for himself and Mansor beautiful pistols, but for the wife of the Vizier a comb. As the peddler was closing his chest the Caliph saw a little drawer, and asked if there were wares in it. The peddler drew out the drawer, and showed therein a box containing a blackish powder, and a paper with singular writing, which neither the Caliph nor Mansor could read.

"Some time ago I took these two pieces from a merchant who had found them in a street in Mecca," said the peddler; "they are at your service at a low price. I cannot accomplish anything with them."

The Caliph, who would gladly have an old manuscript in his library, even though he could not read it, bought the manuscript and powder, and dismissed the peddler. But the Caliph, being anxious to know what the manuscript contained, asked the Vizier if he knew of one who could decipher it.

"Gracious Sir and Master," answered the other, "in the large Mosque lives a man called Selim the Learned, who understands all languages; let him come; perhaps he understands these mysterious characters."

The learned Selim was soon fetched.

"Selim," spoke the Caliph to him, "Selim, they say that thou art very learned; peep a little into this manuscript to see whether thou canst read it. If thou canst read it thou shalt receive from me a new holiday dress; if not, thou shalt receive twelve strokes on the ear and five-and-twenty on the soles of the feet, because, without reason, they call thee Selim the Learned."

Selim prostrated himself and spoke: "Thy will be done, O Sir!" Long contemplated he the manuscript, but suddenly cried out: "This is Latin, O Sir, or let me be hanged."

"Say what is therein," commanded the Caliph, "if it be Latin."

Selim commenced to translate: "Of all mankind whosoever finds this, praise Allah for his grace. For whosoever snuffs of the powder in this box and thereupon says: *Mutabor* (a Latin word denoting a wish to be transformed), can be changed into any animal, and understand its language. When he wishes to return again to his human form, he bows himself three times towards the East and speaks that word. But let him take care when he is transformed that he laughs not, else the magic word vanishes completely from his memory, and he is and remains an animal."

As Selim the Learned thus read, the Caliph was pleased beyond measure. He made the learned man swear to tell no one at any time of the secret, presented him with a handsome dress, and dismissed him; but to his Grand Vizier he said: "That I call a good purchase, Mansor. How delightful to be an animal for a time.

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Come thou to me early to-morrow morning. Then will we go together in the fields, snuff something out of the box, and listen to what is spoken in the air and water, amid the woods and in the fields."

The next morning the Caliph had scarcely dressed himself and broken his fast, when the Grand Vizier appeared, as his master had commanded, in order to accompany him in his walk. The Caliph stuck the box with the magic powder in his girdle, and, commanding his attendants to remain behind, went alone with the Grand Vizier on the way. They went first through the Caliph's large garden; but in vain sought some living thing in order to try the experiment. The Vizier finally proposed to go far away to a pond where he had often seen many animals, especially storks, which had attracted his attention through their grave ways and rattling bills.

The Caliph approved of the proposition of his Vizier, and went with him to the pond. As they arrived there they saw a stork going seriously to and fro, seeking frogs, and now and then clapping his bill together. At the same time they saw a stork high up in the air soaring towards them.

"By my beard, Gracious Master," said the Grand Vizier, "these two long-legs are holding a pretty talk with one another. How if we become storks?"

"Well spoken!" answered the Caliph, "but, beforehand, we will once more contemplate how to become men again. So! Bow three times towards the East, and say *Mutabor*. So again I am Caliph and thou Vizier. But, for heaven's sake, do not laugh, else are we lost!"

While the Caliph was speaking he saw the other stork flying over their heads and finally alight. He drew the box quickly out of his girdle, took a good pinch, offered it to the Grand Vizier, who likewise snuffed, and both cried *Mutabor!*"

Then their legs shrivelled up and became thin and red; the pretty golden slipper of the Caliph and his companion became ill-shaped stork feet; the arms changed into wings, the necks grew quickly out of their shoulders, and became an ell long; the beard vanished, and their bodies were presently covered with soft feathers.

"You have a pretty bill, Sir Grand Vizier," spoke the Caliph, with great astonishment. "By the beard of the prophet, I have never seen anything like it in my life."

"Thanks!" most submissively returned the Vizier, while he bowed himself, "but, if I may dare venture, your highness looks like the storks near us, but even more attractive as Caliph. But, come, if it pleases you, that we watch our companions yonder and learn whether we truly understand the stork language."

At this instant the other stork dropped upon the ground, and with her beak she cleaned her feet, preened herself, and then went to the other stork. The two new storks hastened to approach them, and, to their great astonishment, heard the following conversation:

"Good morning, Lady Longlegs. Already so early upon the meadow?"

"Many thanks, dear Rattlebill; I am taking a little breakfast. Possibly you would like a quarter of a lizard or a leg of a young frog?"

"Thanks, but I have no appetite to-day. I come on the meadow upon another errand. I shall dance to-day before my father's guests, and I wish to have a little quiet practice."

At the same the young stork pranced with strange movements through the field, while the Caliph and Mansor watched her with astonishment. But as she stood upon one foot in a picturesque attitude, the while gracefully flapping her wings, they could no longer contain themselves, and incessant laughter broke from their bills. It was a long time before they recovered their composure, but the Caliph composed himself, and said: "That was a sight which could not be bought with gold. It is a pity that these dumb animals have been frightened by our laughter, else had they certainly regaled us with song!"

But at this moment it occurred to the Vizier that laughing was forbidden during the transformation. He therefore imparted his anxiety to the Caliph. "By Mecca and Medina, it will be a sorry pastime if I must remain a stork! Dost thou remember the stupid word?"

"I cannot, I fear. Three times towards the East we should bow, and, in doing so, say 'Mu-Mu-Mu.'"

They then faced towards the East, and bowed incessantly, so that their bills touched the ground. But, O Misery! The magic word had escaped them. As often as the Caliph bowed himself, his Vizier despairingly cried, "Mu-Mu," but remembrance of the magic word did not come to them, and the poor Caliph and his Grand Vizier were and remained storks.

Thus enchanted, they wandered through the fields. They knew not what to do in their misery. They could not get out of their stork skins; they could not return to the city to make themselves known, for who would believe the statement of a stork, that he was the Caliph? And even if they did believe, would the inhabitants of Bagdad want a stork for a Caliph?

So they sneaked about for many days, and scantily supported life on the products of the field, which they could not easily eat through their long bills. As to the lizards and frogs, the human storks had no appetite for such morsels, especially as they feared to disorder their stomachs and suffer from indigestion. The one pleasure they had in this situation, was that they could fly; and they often flew upon the roofs of Bagdad, in order to see what was taking place there.

During the first few days they observed a great commotion and an appearance of mourning in the streets. But on the fourth day of their enchantment, they by chance alighted on the Caliph's palace, and from thence saw below them in the street a gorgeous procession passing. Drums and fifes resounded, and a man in gold-embroidered scarlet mantle sat upon a richly-caparisoned horse and was surrounded by brilliantly bedecked servants. Half Bagdad ran after him, and all shrieked: "Hail, Mizra, the ruler of Bagdad!"

Then the two storks on the roof of the palace looked at each other, and the Caliph Chasid spoke: "Canst thou now guess, oh Grand Vizier, why I am enchanted? This Mizra is the son of my mortal enemy, the powerful sorcerer Raschner, who in an evil hour swore vengeance on me. But I will not yet give up hope. Come with

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me, thou faithful companion of my destiny, we will wander to the graves of the prophets; perhaps a holier place may break the enchantment."

They lifted themselves from the roof of the palace and flew towards the country of Medina. Their flying was not very good, as the two storks had had little practice, and, after a couple of hours, "Oh, Sir!" groaned the Grand Vizier, "with your permission, I can endure it no longer. You fly too quickly; besides, it is evening, and it would be well to find shelter for the night!"

Chasid listened to the petition of his servant, and there in the valley perceived a ruin, which appeared as if it would afford shelter, so they flew there. The place where they came down for the night seemed to have formerly been a castle. Beautiful columns towered amid the shattered ruins, and many rooms, which were in a tolerably good state of preservation, bore witness to the former splendours of the building.

Chasid and his attendant went through the corridor to find a dry place. Suddenly the stork Mansor stopped.

"Sir and master," whispered he, softly, "if it is not foolish for a Grand Vizier to fear ghosts, it is even less so for a stork; but, in truth, I am sore afraid, for I hear a moaning near at hand. My courage has forsaken me, for I surely hear sighs and groans."

The Caliph remained quiet, and clearly heard a subdued weeping that appeared to come from a human being rather than an animal. Full of expectation, he hastened towards the place from whence came the plaintive sounds. But the Vizier pecked him on the wing with his bill, and beseeched him not to venture into new and unknown danger.

But in vain! The Caliph, whose heart remained valiant under his stork-wings, tore himself away with some loss of feathers, and hastened into a dark and gloomy corridor. He arrived speedily at a door, which appeared to be only on the latch, and from whence distinct sighs and low hootings were heard.

He pushed open the door with his bill, but stopped, surprised, upon the threshold. In the dilapidated room, that was only scantily illumined through a little lattice window, he saw, sitting upon the floor, a large night-owl. Big tears rolled out of her large round eyes, and in a hoarse voice she poured forth her complaint from her crooked beak.

As she perceived the Caliph and his Vizier she raised a cry of joy, and with elegance of manner wiped the tears from her eyes with her big spotted wings. Then,

to the great astonishment of both, she cried in good Arabic: "Welcome, O Storks. You come as a token to me of my deliverance; for it was prophesied to me in my childhood that a great happiness would come to me through storks."

When the Caliph recovered from his wonderment he brought together his thin feet with great dignity, and, bending his long neck, spoke as follows: "Night-owl, from thy words I believe I see in thee a fellow sufferer. But, alas! thy hope that through us salvation is secured is in vain. Thou wilt perceive our helplessness when thou hast heard our story." The Caliph then began to relate what we already know.

When he had ended his story, the owl thanked him, and said: "Hear also my story, and learn why I am no less unhappy than thou art. My father is the King of India; I am his unhappy and only daughter, named Ra. That sorcerer, Raschner, who has enchanted thee, has also doomed me to misery. He came one day to my father and desired me as wife for his son Mizra. But my father, who is a passionate man, had him thrown down stairs. That evening he prowled in the neighbourhood in another form, and, as I was in my garden taking refreshments, a disguised slave brought me a drink which transformed me into this detestable form. He then brought me hither fainting with fright, and in a frightful voice, cried: 'Here shalt thou remain, ugly and despised of all animals, until the end, or until someone shall take thee to wife in order to set thee free. Thus I revenge myself on thee and thy haughty father.'

"Since that time, many months have passed, and I live solitary and sad within these walls, detested by all the world, and looked at with horror by even the animals; beautiful Nature is shut out from me, as I am blind by day, and only when the pale light of the moon is reflected on these walls does the veil fall from my eyes."

The owl ceased speaking, and with her wings wiped away the tears which the narration of her sufferings had drawn.

The Caliph was plunged in deep thought by the narrative of the princess. "If all things do not deceive me, I perceive a certain connection between our unhappiness, but how can I find the key to this mystery?"

The owl answered: "Oh, sir! this my heart also foretold. It was prophesied to me in my youth by a wise woman that a stork would bring happiness to me, and possibly I know how we can save ourselves."

The Caliph was very much astonished, and asked what means she could suggest.

"The sorcerer who has made us both unhappy," said she, "comes to these ruins once every month. The banquet-hall is not far from this room, and he uses it for feasting with many companions. Already I have often heard them relate to one another their infamous deeds, and perhaps he may chance to speak aloud the magic word which has changed thee."

"Oh, dearest princess," cried the Caliph, "tell me when he comes again and where is this place to be found?"

The owl was silent for a minute, and then spoke: "Take it not unkindly, but only on one condition can I fulfil your wish."

"Speak, speak!" cried Chasid, "I am content with anything."

"It is this: I am desirous of being set free at the same time, and that can only be done if one of you will wed me."

The storks appeared perplexed by this proposition, and the Caliph beckoned to his servant to step aside with him. "Grand Vizier," spoke the Caliph, behind the door, "this is a foolish affair, but thou couldst certainly take her."

"Indeed," answered the other, "that I certainly could not do, for if I return home my wife would scratch my eyes out! Besides, I am an old man, and you are yet young and unmarried, and could easier give your hand in marriage to a pretty young princess."

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"That is true," sighed the Caliph, while he sadly hung his wings, "but who told thee that she was young and pretty? I call this buying a wife in a sack."

They tried to persuade one another for a long time, but finally, as the Caliph saw that his Vizier would rather remain a stork than marry the owl, he resolved to fulfil the condition himself. The owl was overjoyed, and she confessed to them that they could not have come at a better time, as probably the sorcerer would arrive that very night.

She then left the room with the storks in order to conduct them to the banquet-hall, and they went for a long time through a gloomy corridor. Presently a bright light beamed upon a partially fallen wall, and as they reached the spot the owl advised them to keep very quiet.

From the opening upon which they stood they could overlook a large room, which was surrounded with gorgeously-decorated pillars. Many coloured lamps made up for the light of day, while in the middle of the room stood a round table covered with a great abundance of choice dishes. On a sofa encircling this table sat eight men, and in one of these men the storks recognised the peddler who had sold them the magic powder. His neighbour now called upon him to relate his latest deeds, and, among others, he told the story of the Caliph and his Vizier.

"What word hast thou given to them?" asked another sorcerer.

"A right strong Latin one—it is called *Mutabor*."

As the storks heard this through the broken wall they were nearly beside themselves with joy, and ran, so quickly upon their long legs to the door of the ruin, that the owl could scarcely follow. Then, said the Caliph, with emotion, to the owl: "Saviour of my life, and of the life of my friend, accept our eternal thanks, and for what thou hast done for us, take me as thy husband."

But soon they turned themselves to the East; three times the storks bowed their long necks towards the sun as it was rising from behind the mountains. "*Mutabor!*" cried they; and instantly they were changed, and in the great joy of returning life, master and servant lay smiling and weeping in one another's arms.

But who can describe their astonishment at what they now saw. A beautiful lady, elegantly dressed, stood before them, and laughing, gave her hand to the Caliph.

"Do you not recognise your night owl?" said she.

It was she, indeed!

The Caliph was so delighted with her grace and beauty, that he cried out, "that it was now his greatest happiness that he had been a stork."

The three then drew near Bagdad, and the Caliph found in his dress the box with the magic powder, and also his money-bag. In the next village he bought what was necessary, and so they soon came to the gates of Bagdad. But there the arrival of the Caliph was witnessed with the greatest astonishment. The people had given him up for dead, and were overjoyed to have their loved ruler once more with them.

But for this reason their hatred towards the impostor, Mizra, raged all the stronger. They rushed to the palace, and took the old sorcerer and his son prisoners. The Caliph sent the elder to the same room in the ruins where the princess had lived as an owl, and left him hanging there. But the son, who understood nothing of the father's necromancy, the Caliph gave the choice whether he would die or snuff the powder. As he chose the latter, the Grand Vizier offered him the box. A suitable pinch, and the magic word of the Caliph transformed him into a stork, and the Caliph shut him in an iron cage and placed him in his garden.

Long and happily the Caliph lived with his wife, the princess. But his happiest moments were always when his Grand Vizier visited him in the afternoon. Oftentimes they spoke of their stork adventure, and if the Caliph was in a happy mood he condescended to imitate the Grand Vizier as he saw him as a stork. He stalked earnestly with stiff feet about the room, clapping his jaws together, fanning with his arms like wings, and showed how they uselessly bowed themselves towards the East and cried "Mu-Mu." To the wife of the Caliph and their children this representation was a great pleasure, but if the Caliph too long clapped and cried "Mu-Mu," the Vizier threatened to communicate what transpired behind the door about the princess owl.

W. H.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON SHORT STORIES

LIST OF SERIALS SOON TO APPEAR.

IT CAME TO PASS.
The story of a runaway wife. (Commences to-day.)

THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD.
The story of a shameful crime. (Commences September 7th.)

THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE.
The story of a loveless marriage.

SINBAD'S VALLEY.
A story of marvellous adventure.

THE MAN WITH THE CAMERA.
The startling story of a stolen fortune.

THE GREAT MIDDLEWICK BANK ROBBERY.
The story of a man hunt.

A GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY OF ADVENTURE BY GEORGE GRIFFTH.
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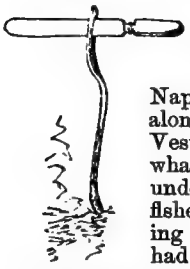
The Heart of a Maid



THE sun had not yet risen, and a broad grey mist, extending even to Naples, and darkening the little villages along that coast, stretched over Mount Vesuvius. The sea was still, but on the wharf, beautifully located in a narrow bay under the high, rocky cliffs of Sorrento, fishermen and their wives were busy pulling ashore the boats with the nets that had been left out over night.

"See, Rachel, there is our priest," said an old woman to a little child of ten, who was wringing her distaff near by. "He is just getting into a boat. Anthony is to take him over to Capri. Goodness gracious! how drowsy the worthy gentleman looks!" With that she waved her hand in a friendly manner to the little priest, who had just taken his place in the boat. The others on the shore stopped their work to return the cordial greeting that the father had for them all.

"Are we to have fair weather, my boy?" asked the priest, looking doubtfully towards Naples.

"The sun is not yet up," replied the young fellow. "It will soon make way with the fog."

"Then row rapidly that we may reach Capri before it becomes hot." Anthony was just about to push the boat out into deep water, when he suddenly stopped and gazed towards the steep path leading from Sorrento down to the shore.

A young girl was visible there, walking rapidly down the steep ascent and beckoning with her handkerchief. She had an almost haughty, but rather uncouth manner, of tossing her head, and her black locks, hanging gracefully over her forehead, became like a diadem.

"Why are we waiting?" asked the priest.

"There comes someone towards the boat who wishes to go with us. With your permission, father, she may go, it will take no longer; she is only a young girl of scarcely eighteen."

At this moment the girl stepped from behind the wall that bounded the path. "Laurella!" said the priest, "what calls her to Capri?"

Anthony shrugged his shoulders. The girl hastened forward, her eyes fixed straight before her.

"Good morning, Laurella," said the priest. "How are you to-day? Are you also going to Capri?"

"If I may be permitted, father."

"Ask Anthony, he is the owner of the boat. Everyone is master of his own possessions, and God is ruler over all."

"There is half a lire (5d.)," she said, without looking up, "if I may go for that."

"You can make better use of it than I," muttered the young fellow, pushing aside some baskets of oranges to make room for her. He was to sell them at Capri, as the rocky island did not produce enough for the demand of the numerous visitors.

"I don't want to be carried for nothing," replied the girl, with a twitch of her black eyebrows.

"Come along, child," said the priest, "he is a generous youth and does not want to make money out of you. There, get in"—as he reached her his hand—"and sit down here by me. See, he has thrown down his jacket for you, so that you may sit comfortably. He has not treated me so well, but with young people that is always the way. For a young lady more pains will be taken than for a dozen clergymen. Well, well, Anthony, you need make no excuse. It is God's will that like should take to like."

Laurella, in the meantime, got in and seated herself, pushing aside the jacket without saying a word. The young boatman let it lie and murmured between his teeth. Then he pushed powerfully against the pier, and the boat sped out into the gulf.

"Has that artist, the Neapolitan, who wished to marry you, been heard of lately?" asked the priest.

She shook her head.

"He came once to paint your portrait. Why did you refuse him?"

"What did he want of it? There are others more beautiful than I. And then—who knows what he would have done with it? He might have bewitched me with it, and charmed my soul, my mother said."

"Do not believe such horrible things," said the priest, earnestly. "You could easily see that he loved you. Would he otherwise have wished to marry you?"

"I want no husband, never!" she said, quite haughtily, and yet almost to herself.

"Have you made a vow, or do you wish to become a nun?"

She shook her head.

She had nothing more to say. The priest also became quiet.

When after a two hours' journey they glided into the harbour of Capri, Anthony carried the reverend gentleman over the shallow waves and set him down on the shore. Laurella, however, did not wait for him to wade back and carry her in the same manner, but gathering up her skirts, holding her bundle in one hand and her wooden shoes in the other, splashed hurriedly to shore.

"I think I shall stay at Capri," said the priest, "and you need not wait for me. Perhaps I shall not return until to-morrow, and you, Laurella, when you return, remember me to your mother; I will try to call this week. You will return before night, I suppose."

"If I have an opportunity," she said.

"You know that I must go back," said Anthony, in what seemed to him a very indifferent tone. "I will wait for you until sunset, but if you do not come it will make no difference."

"You must come," interrupted the priest. "You must not leave your mother alone over night. Is it far to the place where you are going?"

"To Anacapri."

"And I am going to Capri. God protect you, my child, and you, my son."

Laurella kissed his hand and uttered a farewell parting, in which the priest and Anthony might share, but the latter took no part of it for himself. He lifted his hat to the priest, but paid no attention to Laurella.

When they had both turned their backs on him, he

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allowed his eyes for a short time to follow the priest, who stepped carefully over the coarse gravel, and then turned them towards the girl, who had wandered up the steep bank at the right, holding her hand over her eyes to protect them from the sun. Just before the path was lost between the walls on the hill-top, she stopped, as if to catch her breath, and looked about her. The sea lay at her feet: round about her towered the rugged rocks; the water was blue, and in rare splendour—it was, indeed, a spectacle worth beholding. By chance her glance glided by Anthony's boat and met his gaze. They both started as if to excuse themselves, and Laurella resumed her journey with firmly-closed lips.

It was only an hour past noon, and Anthony had already been sitting for two hours in front of the fisherman's tavern. Something seemed to occupy his mind, for every few minutes he would jump up, step out into the sunshine, and look carefully over the two roads that lead, on the right and on the left, to the two island town.

Suddenly he sprang up. "I must go," he said. "Here is my passenger from Sorrento, who came over with us this morning, and who wants to go back to her sick mother before night."

"Oh, well, it is a long time before night," said the fisherman, "she will have time to drink a glass of wine. Wife, bring a glass."

"Thank you, I do not care for any," said Laurella, and remained at some distance.

"Fill up the glass, wife; she will drink it."

"Let her alone," said Anthony, "she is stubborn; what she does not want to do, no saint can persuade her to do." Thereupon he took a hasty departure, went down to the boat, loosened the rope, and stood waiting for the girl. She waved a farewell to the tavern keepers, and with trembling steps followed him. She looked about in all directions as if expecting other company, but the landing was deserted; the fishermen were either sleeping or fishing, a few women were sitting in the doorways dozing or spinning, and the strangers who had come over in the morning preferred to wait and return in the cool of the evening. She had not time to look round long, for before she could prevent it Anthony took her in his arms and carried her like a child to the boat. Then he jumped in, and with a few brisk strokes of the oars they were out on the deep water.

She seated herself in the prow with her back half turned towards him, so that he could see only the side of her face. Her features were more serious than usual; her hair hung down over her forehead, a haughty expression played around her nose, and her mouth was firmly closed. After they had been some little time on the water she began to feel the heat of the sun, and taking the bread from her handkerchief, she put the latter over her head and began to eat the bread, for, as she had not stopped to eat anything at Capri, she was very hungry.

It was not long before Anthony took two oranges from a basket that had been full in the morning, and said: "Eat these with your bread, Laurella. Do not think that I have saved them for you; they rolled out of a basket into the boat, and I found them here when I put the empty baskets back again."

"You eat them; my bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing on a warm day, and you have walked a long distance."

"They gave me a glass of water up there, and that refreshed me."

"As you like," he said, and dropped them into the basket.

Again there was silence; the sea was as smooth as glass, and there was scarcely a ripple at the keel. Even the white seagulls flew silently after their prey.

"You might take the oranges to your mother," continued Anthony.

"We have some at home, and when they are gone I will go and buy some more."

"Take them to her with my compliments."

"She does not know you."

"Then you can tell her who I am."

"I do not know you, either."

This was the first time that she had denied knowing him. A year before, when the artist had first come to Sorrento, it happened that Anthony and some other young fellows were, one Sunday, playing ball near the principal street. There the Neapolitan first met Laurella, as she passed by without noticing him, carrying a pitcher on her head. The artist, struck by the sight, stopped and gazed at her, forgetting that he was on the ground occupied by the players. A rough ball striking his ankle reminded him that that was not the place to lose oneself in thought.

He looked round, expecting an apology, but the young boatman who had thrown the ball stood silent and defiant among his companions, and the stranger thought it best to depart quietly. The event, however, was talked of, and recently, too, when the artist wooed Laurella.

"I do not know him," she said, when her suitor asked if she had refused him on account of that impolite fellow. She, too, had heard of that gossip, but afterwards she certainly did recognise Anthony when she met him.

Now they sat there in the boat as bitterest enemies, and the heart of each was beating violently. Anthony's kind face was greatly agitated; he beat the waves with his oars, and splashed the spray all over himself, and his lips frequently trembled as if he were on the point of saying something unkind. She pretended not to notice it, looked somewhat embarrassed, leant over the edge of the boat, and let the water run between her fingers. Then she loosened her handkerchief and arranged her hair, as though alone in the boat. Her eyebrows twitched, and in vain did she put her wet hands to her burning cheeks to cool them.

Now they were far out on the water. Not a boat was to be seen; the island was far in their rear, and the coast lay far off in the hazy sunlight. Not even a seagull broke the loneliness. Anthony looked around him, a thought flashed into his mind, his redness suddenly left him; he let the oars drop. Laurella involuntarily looked up, anxious but fearless.

"This must come to an end," said he. "It has lasted altogether too long, and I am really surprised that I have not been ruined by it. You do not know me you say. Have you not seen for a long time how I have conducted myself towards you, and have you not known how full my heart is? and yet you always treat me coolly and turn your back on me."

"Have I ever encouraged you? Am I to blame if you lose your head? What claim have you over me?"

"You will not talk in that way long," he said, trembling from head to foot. "I am man enough not to let my life be destroyed by such an obstinate girl. Do you realise that you are in my power and must do as I wish?"

She started up and gazed at him, saying slowly: "Kill me if you dare!"

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"One must not do things by halves," said he, and his voice became hoarse. "There is room for us both in the sea. I cannot help you, my child, but we must go down together, and now!" he cried, in a loud voice, and quickly siezed her in his arms. But, in a moment, he drew back his right hand; it was bleeding—she had bitten him.

"Must I do as you wish?" she said, pushing him from her. "We will see if I am in your power!" and then she jumped into the water and disappeared for a moment.

She soon came to the surface; her clothes clung close to her; her hair was dishevelled by the waves, and hung over her neck. She struck out boldly with her arms, and, without uttering a word, swam away from the boat, towards the shore. A sudden fright overcame the would-be lover, who stood there leaning over, and followed her with his eyes, as if a miracle were being unfolded before him. Collecting his thoughts, he grasped the oars and pulled towards her with all the strength he could summon.

In a moment he was at her side, although she was swimming very fast. "By all that is sacred," he cried, "come into the boat. I have been a fool; like a flash from heaven something came into my head, and I knew not what I did. I do not ask for forgiveness, but I beg of you to get into the boat and save your life."

She swam on as though she heard nothing.

"You cannot reach the land, it is two miles away. Think of your mother. If any misfortune should happen to you it would kill her."

With a glance she measured the distance to the shore, and then, without answering, swam to the boat, and seized the edge of it with her hands. He rose to help her; his jacket, which had been lying on the seat, slipped into the water when the boat was drawn to one side by the weight of the maiden. Quickly she climbed up and regained her former seat. When he saw that she was safe, he took up the oars once more, while she wrung the water from her dripping skirts and from her wet hair.

Then she looked down and noticed the blood. She cast a hasty look at the hand, which, as though unwounded, was pulling away at the oar. "There!" she said, and handed him her handkerchief. He shook his head and rowed onward. She rose, stepped towards him, and bound the handkerchief about the deep wound. Then, although he objected, she took the oar from his hand, and without looking at him, but looking at the oar all stained with blood, she pushed the boat forward with powerful strokes. Both were pale and still. As they came nearer to land they were met by fishermen, who greeted Anthony and teased Laurella. Neither of them looked up or made any answer.

The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the wharf. Laurella shook out her skirts, which had now become nearly dry, and sprang to shore.

"Good-bye," said Laurella, and turned to the path leading up the hill towards her home.

"Good-day," answered Anthony, without looking at her. Then he carried the things out of his boat and climbed the stone steps leading to his cabin.

He was alone in the two rooms through which he now passed back and forth. Through the little open window the air was blowing much more refreshingly than it had been out on the water, and, on the whole, he was well pleased with the solitude.

Time was heavy on his hands; he longed for the darkness, for he was tired, and the loss of blood had weakened him more than he had supposed. He felt a violent pain in his hand, sat down on a stool and loosened the bandage. The blood gushed forth again, and the hand was badly swollen round the wound. He washed it carefully and cooled it a long time. When he drew it from the water, he could distinguish clearly the prints of Laurella's teeth.

"She was right," he said, "I was a beast, and I deserve nothing better. I shall send her her handkerchief to-morrow, for I don't want her to see me again."

The bright moonlight and the pain in his hand awakened him from a restless sleep, and he was just springing up to quiet in cold water the throbbing in his hand, when he heard a noise at his door. He opened it, and Laurella stood before him.

Without saying much she entered, and threw off the wrap she had worn over her head, and put a little basket on the table. Then she stopped to breathe.

"You came for your handkerchief, I suppose?" said he. "You might have spared yourself the trouble, for I would have sent it to you in the morning."

"That had nothing to do with my coming," she quickly replied. "I have been out on the mountain, gathering herbs to heal your hand. There!" and she raised the cover of the basket.

"Heavens!" cried he. "Are you ill? You are trembling from head to foot."

"It is nothing," she said. "I am going now," and she tottered towards the door. Here she burst into a fit of weeping, which so overpowered her that she pressed her brow against the doorpost and sobbed loudly and violently. Before he could reach her she turned suddenly and threw her arms round his neck.

"I can't stand it any longer," she cried, and pressed him to her, passionately. "Strike me, trample me under foot, or, if it is still true that you love me even yet, after all the evil that I have done you, then take me and treat me as you wish, make of me what you will, but do not send me thus away from you!"

Silently he held her awhile in his arms.

"Whether I still love you?" he cried, finally. "By all that is sacred! Do you suppose that all my heart's blood has run out through that little wound? Don't you feel it beating there in my breast, just as though it would come out and to you? If you say this merely to tempt me, or because you have pity on me, then go. I will forget even this. You must not imagine that you owe me this because you know what I suffer on your account."

"No," she said, firmly, and looked up from his shoulders with her moistened eyes. "I love you, and now that I have said it, I will confess that I have long striven against it. But now I will become different, for I cannot longer stand it not to look at you when you meet me in the street. Now I will kiss you, too, so that when you are in doubt you can remember 'she kissed me,' and Laurella kisses no one except him whom she wishes to marry."

She kissed him thrice, and then freed herself, saying: "Good-night, my dear; go now to sleep, and nurse your hand, but don't go home with me, for I am not afraid."

With that she darted through the door and disappeared in the darkness.

When the little priest left the church after Laurella's next confession, he smiled quietly to himself.

"Now may the Lord bless her," he said, "and let me live until Laurella's eldest boy can row me across the bay in place of his father."

P. H.

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THE OUTLAWS' TREASURE

SUMMARY.

The mail train has been robbed between Cornwall and La Grange stations, and £20,000 worth of gold stolen by a gang of desperadoes, headed by two brothers named Mulligan. Two passengers on the train—Adolph Squirrek, *alias* Smith, a detective tracking the Mulligans, and Fred Weldon, a young lawyer—who have struck up an acquaintance on the way, alight at Somerville, where the former stopped at the "Drover," and the latter at his mother's house. During the night a message comes to say that Judge Woodland's horse has come back alone, and Weldon, together with Squirrek and two other men, set out to find him, and discover one of Mulligan's confederates lying senseless on the road. The man, who had made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the judge, is sentenced to forty years' imprisonment. At Judge Woodland's Weldon meets a Spaniard named Alvarido Almanaz, and the two men become rivals for the love of Florence, the judge's daughter. Weldon is inveigled to a lonely bridge near Cornwall, and disappears. Squirrek pays a fruitless visit to the spot. Squirrek arouses the citizens of Cornwall, who make their way to the outlaws' hiding-place. One outlaw is found and killed, and the cabin is set fire to. Squirrek discovers a piece of paper with the following cryptogram: "1——0——1. Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg." He afterwards falls in with the two remaining outlaws, and has them arrested. They are lynched by a furious mob. Both Florence Woodland and her father have dreams of Señor Almanaz in connection with Fred Weldon's disappearance. The Señor leaves Somerville professedly for Cuba.

CHAPTER XXIII.

(From the Journal of Florence Woodland.)

FLORENCE SOLVES A RIDDLE FOR TWO PEOPLE.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER ——.—The days come and go, with their sadness to some and their joys to others. There seems no reason why I should not be as happy as a young person in the best of health, with the kindest and most indulgent of parents, should be.

And so I am except that I feel for the grief of poor Mrs. Weldon, who still clings to the belief that her son is living somewhere, and is in need of her help. Poor soul! I have given up the faint hope that I once shared with her, and I pray that her Heavenly Father will heal the great woe which has fallen upon her.

The journal of Florence Woodland.

Yesterday I received a letter from Señor Almanaz, written in Chicago, where he said he was compelled to remain a few days to settle up some business affairs. It was very polite, and he was gentlemanly enough to make no reference to our last interview. After giving me his best wishes, he asked as a personal favour, which, as he says, will be the only one he will ever ask. I cannot refuse to grant it, as it is in my power to do so.

"I have been told," so his letter reads, "that you have a special aptitude in solving enigmas, riddles, and cipher-writing. A friend placed in my hand, some time since, some cipher, with the request that I would translate it for him. I confess that I cannot do so. If you find yourself able to make out the meaning, and will be kind enough to send it to me, you will make me ever your debtor. Here it is:

"'1—0—1.'

"'Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg.'

"May I ask further that you will let this little matter remain a mutual secret."

As this seems to be a harmless request, and I felt that perhaps I had been a little unjust towards him, I set to work to unravel his riddle for him.

It was not the hardest thing of the kind that I ever undertook, and I succeeded after a few hours. The figures "1—0—1," at the top, contain the key, which I discovered after pretty severe labour, and then I read it without trouble. There does not seem much meaning in it; but such as it is he is welcome, and I simply wrote out my translation and posted it to him, only adding that I was glad to do him so slight a favour.

SATURDAY EVENING.—What does it mean? The letter to Señor Almanaz has scarcely left my hands, when the following reaches me:

"Chicago, November ——.

"Miss Florence Woodland,—Please undertake a task, which although it may not be difficult to you, I am unable to accomplish. Your father once remarked your singular ability at unravelling difficult problems and riddles, which he said you displayed in early childhood. Here is something that has floored me:

"'1—0—1'

"'Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg.'

"I have racked my brains over it in vain. If your fortunate faculty in hieroglyphical lore will enable you to decipher this, I may succeed in getting you a commission upon what future rosetta stones the English Government may discover in Egypt. But, seriously, you will do me a greater service than you imagine by unravelling this mystery, and, above all, let me caution you to keep this a secret, and should you receive *a request from any other source, pay no attention to it. Don't forget this!* You, no doubt, will be willing to trust me in this matter. "—— SMITH."

This is certainly a strange letter, and it made me feel uncomfortable. As soon as I had read it, I went straight to the post-office to intercept the one I had sent to Señor Almanaz, but I was just too late.

Feeling that I might have done something very wrong, I went to father, explained the whole thing, and asked him what it was best for me to do.

"Telegraph to Smith," he replied, "and we can then head off this other letter."

We made ready to do so, but an insuperable object pre-

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sented itself. Mr. Smith had simply dated his letter "Chicago" without giving the least indication of where he was stopping, so that it was impossible to tell where to direct the telegram. It looks as if he had taken pains to get an envelope which contained not the least reference to his hotel.

"There is no use in crying over spilt milk," said father, in his philosophic manner. "What's done can't be helped, and all you can do is to send your reply to Smith, stating what has happened, so that possibly it may be in his power to rectify the mistake."

I did so at once, and the next mail to Chicago carried my translation and explanatory letter to Mr. Smith. I only hope it has not been sent too late to accomplish all that he wishes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

(From the Journal of Adolph Squirrek, Detective.)

Senor Almanaz Pays a Visit to a Doctor.

Chicago, November.—Señor Alvarido Almanaz is the bird for me to pluck. If I lose sight of him I lose all. He carries the secret of Fred Weldon with him until he is forced to give it up.

It was the handsome Señor who sent the note of warning to the judge and witnesses in the trial of "poor Tom Borie," and it was the same individual who penned the note which led Fred Weldon to the High Bridge over Devil's Creek on that night, a couple of weeks ago, when I failed to warn him in time. The noble Señor was connected with the late Mulligan brothers, in precisely what character I can only conjecture. I can see how convenient such a fellow would be to make away with money and jewels that were likely to be identified, while his tastes led him to keep aloof from intimate association with the members of the gang themselves.

As the noble Señor strongly suspects me of dogging his footsteps, it becomes necessary for me to put on one of the best disguises at my commnnd. I think I have succeeded in "closing up his eye," as the vulgar phrase goes.

On Thursday evening the Señor called upon Miss Woodland, and bade her good-bye, as he proposed starting for Cuba next morning. I suspect she gave him his dismissal, as he strode very angrily down the lane, not even glancing up at the coarse-looking drover that he encountered on his way, and who bade him "good-evening" so civilly.

I sat opposite the noble Señor at the table.

The same night the handsome foreigner started for his Cuba, which, in this instance, means Chicago, and in the same carriage with him rode the humble individual who is just now engaged in writing up his journal.

The Señor bought a through ticket, as also did the humble individual referred to, and when we were fairly under way, he took out the piece of writing which is so difficult to read, and began studying it. By glancing over his shoulder I saw that it was precisely the same as the one held in my pocket-book; but as I became convinced sometime since that it was altogether beyond my skill, I contented myself with reading the *Chicago Tribune*.

Nothing further worthy of note occurred on our journey to Chicago, save that we ran over a cow, and the noble Señor turned pale with fear at the remote prospect of all of us going down the embankment, and into eternity.

We both took rooms at the same hotel, and without attracting suspicion, I secured one adjoining his. When a man sets himself up to keep guard over another, it is well to have him as close at hand as possible.

Both of us were well tired out with our journey, and as the evening was well advanced, I concluded he would need rest as much as myself, and so I tumbled in for the night.

On our way from the distant town of Somerville to this teeming city, the eye of the noble Señor more than once fell upon me. It follows, as a matter of course, that if he runs against me in the hotel, he will have his suspicions awakened, no matter how perfect I may make my disguise.

As a matter of business, therefore, I came out in a new rig—a sort of free-and-easy man of the town, who had an abundance of leisure upon his hands, and to whom, therefore, it might seem natural that he should be given to wandering about the city.

In my new get-up I sat opposite the noble Señor at the table, and tested my disguise by attempting to open a conversation with him. He replied politely, but coolly, and, I am sure, looked upon me in no other light than that of a perfect stranger.

After being at the hotel a couple of days, I have learned that the noble Señor has friends in this city, and once or twice he has visited them, and on each occasion has given me the slip, for which I deserve to be kicked by the first man I meet.

Yesterday he went inside the bar and wrote a letter. He took such precautions while engaged in doing so that I could not get a glimpse of the sheet, but when he had directed it he banged the blotting-paper down upon it, and hurried out of the room.

After a moment's thought I concluded to follow him, as I could afford to lose a little time with the blotting-paper, while there was none to be lost if I wished to keep him under my eye.

He went straight to the post-office, and then came directly back again, and retired to his room. Immediately after this I found occasion to go behind the bar, and took up the blotting-paper pad and examined it.

The pad showed that the noble Cuban had written a letter to Miss Florence Woodland, at Somerville.

And what business has he to write to her? If she has rejected or repulsed him she has done it in a manner which leaves no room for him to renew his attentions. It can't be that; it must be upon a matter of business.

Hold!

That evening of the party at Judge Woodland's, when he and I were engaged in a game of chess, he remarked upon the great skill his daughter displayed in the game, she never having been beaten by anyone. He added that she also had a more extraordinary ability in reading ciphers, and had more than once assisted him in tracing crime by this gift.

Now, the noble Señor has probably learned the same thing, and has applied to her for assistance in making out the puzzle which has baffled both him and me.

He has got the start of me here, and it will be hard work for me to head him off; but it does not seem possible that the skill of Miss Woodland is such as to enable her to unravel the puzzle without several days' study, and I can reach her in time to stop this little game of the gentleman from the Gem of the Antilles.

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I had a glimpse of his confederate.

Friday.—My letter was written and sent, and at the office I learnt the precise hour when the post from Somerville reaches Chicago. A little figuring shows that if a letter leaves that goodly town on the afternoon of Saturday (which will give Miss Woodland several hours to work upon the cipher, providing it promptly reaches her), it will be ready for delivery at the Chicago post-office at precisely six o'clock in the evening of Monday, providing no unforeseen accident occurs to prevent.

This is rather favourable, as that is the hour of tea, and the Señor is a healthy eater, and, I observe, does not go out until about an hour after his evening meal, when he lights his Havanna, and saunters so far away that it is almost morning before he gets back again.

Provided he does not wait for the post at the office, this will give me a chance to forestall him. As such a man has no business to send anything to Miss Woodland, it follows, as a matter of course, that he has no right to receive anything from her, and I must do my utmost to prevent it.

Evening.—Miss Florence Woodland has more skill than I imagined.

She received this puzzle from the noble Señor by one mail, translates and sends the reply the next day, and the whole mystery is unveiled and in my possession this evening.

I took the precaution to give a new touch to my whiskers when I went to the post-office, and called at the window-slide, as it hardly would have done for me to have been identified by the post clerk.

On my way back to tea I met the Cuban, who, I think, wore quite an expectant look on his olive countenance. Ah, me! disappointment comes to all in the affairs of this world.

I am sorry that Miss Woodland will have to lie under the apprehension of having made a bad mistake, but I trust I shall soon be able to set her mind at rest.

All that I am afraid of is that, failing there, the noble Señor may turn elsewhere for help in this matter. If he should get it, he may make a good deal of trouble; but, as he is now in Chicago, he will be likely to remain there until his business is fully settled. At any rate, I do not think he will take up his abode in the gem of the Antilles for some months yet.

I have had a glimpse of his confederate, or perhaps more properly his tool—a low-browed, brutal-looking man, who waited on the outside of the door for him, and the two walked off together. This man answers to the name of Manuel, and is a Spaniard, so that I could not understand anything that passed between them, except an occasional "Tiene usted," "Yo tengo," "Si, señor," "El le tiene," and a few other simple phrases of this language which I have picked up here and there.

They led me a long tramp, going across the river, and to the outskirts of the city, where they halted at a respectable house, rang the bell, and passed in. Walking by the door, I saw on the plate the name, "S. S. Ruthven, M.D."

I waited on the other side of the street for about half an hour, when my two friends emerged to view, talking very earnestly. If I were only barbarian enough to understand the language of Hispaniola, I might have gained a clue to what they were driving at, but it was all "Greek" to me, and as incomprehensible as the cipher submitted to Miss Florence Woodland. I wonder now whether she wouldn't translate their gibberish for me if I should take it down and send it to her?

The noble Señor and his friend Manuel were engaged in such earnest conversation that they came near walking into the river before they discovered that the drawbridge was open.

They kept company until they reached the hotel, and there they went in together, and side by side ascended to the room of the Cuban. I could overhear their words, but, as it was in that wretched foreign tongue, it did me as little good as it did the silent banisters beside me.

CHAPTER XXV.

An Important Bit of Information.

I called on Doctor Ruthven this morning, to procure some medicine for the rheumatism.

As I rang the bell during his regular office hours, I was

Just step back into my private office.

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A dirty-faced urchin entered the room.

fortunate enough to find him in, and to be received with considerable blandness and consideration.

I was in a sort of ministerial costume, with my white neckerchief and golden spectacles, and I have no doubt the physician supposed I belonged to the cloth.

After procuring the medicine and paying his fee, I picked up my hat as if to go, but kept my seat on the sofa, and looking steadily towards him, and speaking as though the idea had just entered my head, I asked:

"Is there much general sickness at present in Chicago?"

"Nothing more than usual; in fact, the public health is rather better than it was during the corresponding quarter last year."

"Is there much fever encountered in your practice?"

"No; I have but one case on my hands."

"Typhus?"

"Yes, or rather the indications are of that nature; but—is there anything more that I can do for you this morning?"

This abrupt answer, together with a sudden flushing of the physician's face, proved conclusively that he had unwittingly revealed something which he should have kept to himself, and his curt query was not only intended as a check to any curiosity upon my part, but as a hint that he would be glad to see me go.

I was on dangerous ground, and prudence told me to retreat. So I rose to my feet, buttoned my overcoat, and drew on my gloves.

"I am obliged to you for your kindness, doctor; hold, there is a little matter upon which I would like to speak to you."

This sudden changing of mind upon my part was caused by the jingling of the surgery bell.

"You'll have to excuse me for a few minutes," he said, walking towards the door to answer the signal himself. "Just step back into my private office until I am through with my visitor." This was the very thing for which I was manœuvring, and I gladly obeyed, while the doctor drew the door behind him.

The minute he was far enough away I rose and softly opened the door the slightest crack in the world, so as to give me a chance of overhearing what passed between the physician and his patient.

A detective police officer must take advantage of every means offered him for obtaining information.

Just what I was praying for! The visitor was the noble Señor Almanaz, who bade the physician good-morning in his usually bland manner.

"You haven't been there since last evening?" was the inquiring remark of the Cuban.

"No; there is no necessity for it. Have you seen him this morning?"

"Yes; I came from there an hour ago."

"How does he seem?"

"I don't know how to answer. The truth of it is," said the Cuban, in a voice so low that I barely managed to catch it, "we can't keep him this way much longer. He must either get well or do the other thing. You see what a constitution he has. The minute we give him a chance he rallies, and then you have to dose him so hard that it takes him to the very border of death."

"Yes, that is true," was the indifferent reply of the doctor. "How much do you expect to make by this speculation?"

"I can't tell. There is a detective on the track and I'm waiting for him to offer a reward, but he hangs back. I've been disappointed in another place," added the noble Señor, somewhat dejectedly, and with his Spanish "Cara-a-a-h!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, if I hadn't been thrown off the track, I would have made enough to let this fellow go to the dogs; but, as it is, we must nurse him along, in the hope of hearing something from this detective."

"Have you taken any means to let him know that he is in Chicago?"

"Yes; a letter was sent to him several weeks ago, stating positively that the young man for whom he was searching was in this city."

"Didn't he bite?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Don't you think he is in Chicago?"

"I have scrutinised every suspicious person I have encountered since I have been here, but have seen no one

A short, stumpy, red-faced man.

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that looks like him. I am afraid he has given over the search."

"Why don't you advertise? You know that is the fashion nowadays in a matter like this. Make the conditions that you are to receive a handsome figure, and no questions asked, or rather no prosecution guaranteed."

"I have thought of that," added the Cuban, after a pause, "but there is too much risk in it."

"Why so?"

"I don't see how it can be done without setting that infernal detective on the track, and making a trouble. If you can think of any way, I'd like to hear it."

"It ain't likely *he'll* advertise at this late day," remarked the doctor, "and if he should get on your track, the best thing you can do is to leave. I don't see where *my* chance is to come in, and I would rather throw up my whole connection with the business than to continue any longer in it."

"I should think you were getting pretty good pay for your services," was the angry reply of the Cuban.

"If I continue my services I shall expect better remuneration than I have received."

The poor fellow was at the very door of death.

There seemed to be a sullen silence for a few moments, and then Almanaz arose to his feet.

"We will call on him together this evening, and in the meantime I will take a look at him myself."

With this he departed; and as the doctor followed him to the outer door I managed to close the inner one, and when he opened it I was busily occupied in exploring "Doctor Dunglison's Dictionary of Medicine."

"Now, my friend, I am at your service."

"You must pardon me," I replied, taking out my watch, "but the hour is later than I imagined. I will call again."

He looked rather curiously at me as I passed out; but no doubt took me for an erratic Pickwickian dominie.

My great anxiety was to reach the street in time to follow Señor Alvarido Almanaz.

Fortunately, I succeeded in doing so.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Missing Man is Found.

I followed the Cuban at a safe distance, for I felt that matters were approaching a crisis, and a false move ment at this point might spoil all. He walked rapidly for fully half a mile, when he turned into one of the lowest and vilest streets of Chicago.

I felt that I was now upon the right trail, and it would not do to let my man escape me. Being in a disguise somewhat similar to that worn in Somerville when the gentleman from the "Gem of the Antilles" penetrated it, I was a little fearful of encountering him at this time.

But he never once looked behind him, and all at once dropped out of sight in such a sudden manner that I thought at first he must have gone through an opening in the pavement; but a little nearer approach showed me that he had only descended into one of those subterranean eating houses so common in all large cities.

I was upon the other side of the street, and when I reached a point about opposite to where my acquaintance had vanished, I dropped into a bellhanger's shop, which had a powerful smell of brass filings and onions, the latter odour no doubt percolating upward from the kitchen.

A grimy-looking man in his shirt sleeves answered the sharp ting-a-ling of the bell as I pushed the door open. He had shaggy eyebrows and enormous yellow whiskers, and surveyed me very keenly. Taking his station directly in front of me, he did not speak, but waited for me to ask my question.

"Can I get you to repair the gas-pipe of my house?"

He slowly shook his head from side to side, shut his eyes, and answered in a sleepy tone:

"I ain't in that business—'tain't in my line. You'll have to go to the plumber's and gasfitter's."

"Oh—ah! thank you."

I turned to go, but with my hand upon the door, paused, as if a sudden thought had struck me.

"A person wished me to inquire whether there was any property for sale in this street."

The man shut his eyes, slowly swayed his head from side to side, and answered in the same drowsy manner:

"Dunno of any."

He was on the point of moving away, when a dirty-faced urchin entered the room, and I took the occasion to present him with a few pennies, which at once conciliated the parent.

"My friend wishes to purchase a restaurant or eating-house. Are there any in this neighbourhood?"

"There's one just across the street," he replied, looking out of the window, "but I don't believe Dick wants to sell it."

"What Dick do you mean?"

"Dick Muggens."

"Has he any name for his place?"

"He calls it the 'Shades,' and does a pretty good business there."

"Does he own the place?"

"I think he does—ain't sure, though. He's made enough to buy it, if he wanted to, long ago."

"Do you think it a desirable property?—here, sonny, are a few more pennies—there is a good run of custom, I suppose?"

"Yes," was the hesitating reply, for the man was answering at random now. "You'd better go over and see Dick yourself."

"Thank you, I will. What did you say his name was?"

He pronounced it very carefully, and I have no doubt would have spelled it, had he possessed sufficient ability, without waiting for me to ask him to do so.

As may be supposed, during the conversation I was keeping a sharp look out for the Cuban. I saw him come out of the door, ascend the steps, and walk rapidly away, while I dallied in this aimless manner until I could make sure that the Señor was beyond danger of discovering me.

It was my intention to personate a gentleman in search of a restaurant, but the information I had gleaned from the bellhanger decided me to change my tactics and adopt a bolder course—one that incurred more risk, but, at the same time, offered the chance of greater success.

I walked slowly up the street until Almanaz vanished round a corner, when I crossed, and walked swiftly towards Mr. Muggens' restaurant, like one who was in a great hurry.

Stepping hastily down the steps I pushed open the door and found myself in an ordinary cheap restaurant, with a short, stumpy, red-faced man standing behind the counter, opening oysters. He and I were the only persons present.

"Good-day, sir," said I, as he looked inquiringly at me. "This is Mr. Muggens, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. What do you want?"

"You have a sick man in the house?"

The man stared impudently at me, and then demanded in a gruff voice:

"What's that to you?"

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"Doctor Ruthven is unable to call, and I consented to look in upon him, in his place."

"Oh! be you the doctor?"

"I am somewhat in a hurry; I will look at him, and, if necessary, leave some medicine."

Mr. Muggens threw down his oyster-knife, wiped his hands upon a dirty serviette, and walked through a door behind him, I following close in his rear.

Up several winding stairs, through several filthy apartments, and he softly opened the door of a room, with the whispered remark:

"He's sleeping."

I controlled myself as well as possible, but I could not avoid pressing close upon him, and peering into the bed, where I caught sight of the form of a man.

"Good heavens!" I gasped.

"What's the matter?" demanded Muggens, turning rather fiercely upon me.

"Nothing at all."

No one can imagine my disappointment, as I scanned the features of the pale, sleeping man, and saw that it was *not* Fred Weldon!

Still, to carry out the part I had undertaken, I drew a chair up to the bed, and felt the pulse of the poor fellow, who, it was evident, was at the very door of death.

"I fancy you know the way out," said Muggens, after watching me for a moment. "There ain't nobody in the shop, so I'll go back, and you can follow yourself."

"Very well," I nodded, and the next moment I was left with the sick man.

"Can it be that I have been going astray all this time?" I asked myself, and stared absently round the room.

"Is it possible that I have been led upon a false scent? Is my young friend indeed dead? Can it be——"

I paused, for at that instant I heard a slight movement in the adjoining room, and with a strange feeling I arose, and pushed open the door.

The apartment was precisely similar to the one into which I had been introduced. There was the low, narrow bed, and stretched upon it, worn to emaciation, pale, with his large, dark eyes wandering round the room, lay Frederick Weldon.

The poor fellow stared at me with the wondering look of a man whose senses are wandering, and it was plain that he did not recognise me.

Stepping hastily to his bedside, I placed my brandy flask to his lips.

"Drink! it will do you good!"

"Drink! It will do you good."

He obeyed, with the meekness of a child, and the hot fluid warmed him almost instantly into life.

"What is your name?" I asked, anxious to test him; but he made no answer until I repeated it several times.

"My name; yes, my name is Weldon—Frederick Weldon, Counsellor-at-Law."

"That is right; I see a wound upon your head. How did you get that?"

"I don't know; yes—let me see. Someone struck me on the head last night, when I was walking towards the High Bridge. Here, I put it all down here; you will find it here."

And, reaching under his pillow, he brought a small blank book, in which I saw he had written a good deal in pencil. Placing it in my pocket, I said:

"I will read it when I go home. How do you feel?"

"I have been very ill, but your brandy has helped me. Give me some more, won't you?"

Another good draught, and he was visibly strengthened.

"Why doesn't mother come?" he asked, the next moment.

"She cannot very well do so just now. I came in her place."

"Who are you?" he asked the next moment, looking very earnestly at me.

"I am Adolph Squirrek, the detective, and your friend."

"Are you?"

A smile overspread his handsome face, but the next moment it vanished, and his forehead became wrinkled with pain.

"My head hurts me very much."

"Never mind; don't try to think, then; only I want you to promise me one thing. Will you do it?"

"I will promise you anything."

"Understand now what I say. There will be some other folks in to see you pretty soon. They will offer you medicine, but you mustn't take it. Do you understand?"

"Yes," was the feeble response.

"Do you promise me?"

"I will remember what you say."

"Don't forget; I will be in to see you again this evening, and am going to take you to your mother as soon as you are able to move. Remember not to take a drop of anything until you see me."

And with this parting warning I left him.

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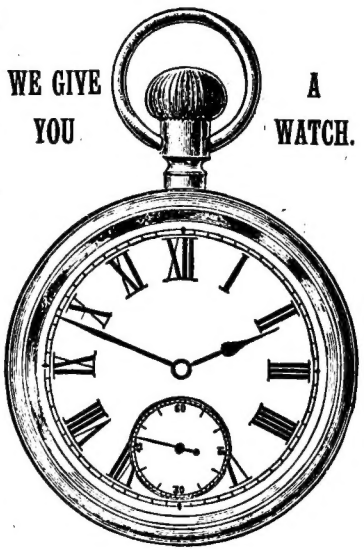

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